

JUNE

25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



The Hill of the Terrified Monk

A Complete Book-Length Novel, by **GEOFFREY HOMES**

What You Do—at Twenty-Two

A stirring air-battle story, by **ARCH WHITEHOUSE**

The Ring of Iscariot, by **NELSON BOND**

Who's Who *in this* Issue

Herbert Agar

BORN forty-four years ago in New Rochelle, Herbert Agar left Princeton in 1917 to serve in World War I. Since then, he has been the author of poetry, novels, and histories, including *MILTON AND PLATO*, *THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE* (the Pulitzer Prize winner for American history in 1934), *LAND OF THE FREE*, and *PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS*. At present, he is a Lieutenant Commander in the United States Navy, loaned by the Navy to the State Department as special assistant to Ambassador Winant in London.

Lt. Commander Agar has spent much of his life fighting for a free mankind, without economic, racial, or political barriers. While he has fought with the passion of a crusader, he has likewise fought with the hard-headed sensibleness of a realist. As editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* he gained respect and admiration throughout the country. As a columnist and contributor to leading magazines, he has been swamped with letters of appreciation of his creed. As lecturer and radio speaker, he has inspired audiences in hundreds of towns, villages, schools and cities in every section of the United States with his dynamic faith. As one of the organizers of *Fight for Freedom* and as president of *Freedom House* he has dedicated his energies to winning the war and insuring a real peace to come.



Photo by G. Maillard Kesslère

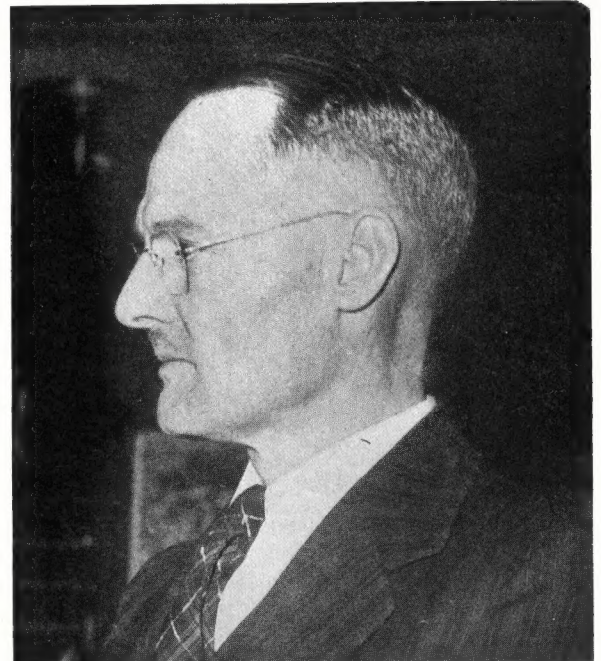
Herbert Agar

Forbes Parkhill

AT present I am languishing in civilian clothes, for somehow the Army has got it into its brass-hatted skull that Life Ends at Forty-five. So don't blame me if we lose this war. I've worked on newspapers in El Paso, Denver and New York, slaved in Hollywood. I've press-agented chambers of commerce, political campaigns, Red Cross drives and theaters. Since Uncle Sam feels he can win this war without putting me back in uniform, I'm dashing about on the Home Front, press-agenting the OPA.

(Mr. Parkhill's daughter feels that in the foregoing he hides his more important attributes under the bushel of modesty, and contributes the following addenda to the record:)

"Besides his more obvious talents known to the general public, I feel that my father has several hidden talents, seen by relatively few. He bathes the dog with a distinguished air, and puts new slats in beds as few could do. He frequently goes on painting sprees which include entire rooms, kitchen furniture and of course ultimately the family, because we always get in it. He excels at making blackout curtains and just being general plumber, electrician, jeweler and mechanic. He likes pressure cookers, candy, pipes that look like saxophones, hiking, football games, *Blondie* and playing squash. His dislikes are few but take in perfume, *Mutt and Jeff*, our milkman, red nail-polish, jazz music and soup."



Forbes Parkhill

BLUE BOOK

June, 1943

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READERS' COMMENT

ADVENTUROUS HEARTS

The Mesa overlooks the wartime phenomenon of San Diego. Far below lies the Bay, the traffic of the Seven Seas. North and east circle the mountain sentinels against the sky. Southward stretches the Border and Mexico. The city seethes—men from the armies and navies of the world, war-workers from forty-eight States. Defense factories belch smoke and noise; housing projects mushroom overnight; airplanes roar into clashing dissonance. The Mesa has none of these. Folk drift up to us burdened with tired hearts and bodies, full of futile arguments on war, rationing and politics. The Mesa has no place for them; and they go with their piping protests, leaving us the play of light across the arroyos, the call of meadowlark and quail.

The Mesa chooses its own. Only those stay who have affinity with the earth, who grasp Life and drink the bitter and the sweet with laughter. Here, striding across the hills with the winds whistling down the cañons behind them, come Omar the Black—hard-hitting Denis Abernathy—Kris-taver the Viking—those friends of the adventurous hearts who step from the pages of BLUE BOOK to share the welcome of our hearth.

Page Huntoon,
Chula Vista, Calif.

ILLUSTRATIONS

I have been a reader of BLUE BOOK for years. Recently I was interested in something which I heard and which I wish to tell to you.

In search of some back issues which I had missed I wandered into a second-hand book store.

To my inquiry, the dealer answered that he had sold every copy of BLUE BOOK in the book store. "In the first place," he said, "BLUE BOOK is the best seller of all fiction for men." He went on to say that just the day before a young lady had purchased his entire file of back issues. Being curious, he had asked why she wanted so many copies. She replied, "I am studying art and magazine illustrating. BLUE BOOK has the best illustrations of any magazine, especially those showing action."

I thoroughly agree with the young lady, I think that your illustrations add to the attractiveness of your magazine and to the vividness of your stories.

W. Bruce Ezell,
Atlanta, Georgia

The



MULLER first saw the ring at an auction. There were many auctions in those days. Men, even vanquished men, must eat. So they disposed of their most cherished possessions for staggering sums—sums which were actually a pittance, because in postwar Germany, the Germany of 1923, it cost three billion marks to mail a postcard, ten billion for a loaf of bread.

It was an economy of chaos, where women and merchants haggled in figures formerly used only by astrono-

mers computing the distance to stars. Lifetime savings were drowned in the flood of presses that gushed forth new currency as fast as the old became valueless. Women trundled to market barrowloads of print which—if they were lucky—might buy enough food for one good meal. Walls were sometimes papered with marks less costly than wallpaper itself.

Muller was more fortunate than most of his countrymen. After the war, the New York daily for which he had been correspondent gave him back his old job, that of covering the

news from the bedlam that was Berlin. He was paid, not in reichsmarks, but in good American gold. Thus, though the pay was meager, he got by. . . .

The ring was a curious piece: antique gold, ponderously conceived and elaborately executed in a somehow weirdly macabre serpentine design. Why he bid on it, Muller did not know—possibly because its grotesquerie fascinated him, or because a latent imperialism was titillated by the auctioneer's provocative hint that it had been "a Crown piece, gentlemen!

RING of ISCARIOT

An amulet of evil dominates this memorable story

by Nelson Bond



From the Kaiser's own personal collection." Or perhaps simply because the ring was offered, he had money with which to bid, and he had never been able to resist the challenge of a public auction.

Whatever his original reason, it was certainly this latter which sharpened his interest when he heard three successive bids topped by a thin voice at the far end of the hall. For Muller, to be thus thwarted was to double his interest in the objective. Consequently, he called his new offering, "*One trillion marks!*" in a tone of cold de-

termination which he hoped might discourage his competitor.

After a moment's pause the thin voice raised the bid to one and a quarter. So Muller's attempt did not bring the desired result. But it *did* bring him a visitor. Even as the auctioneer's gaze queried Muller's response to this new offer, the crowd parted, and a small man thrust his way to Muller's side.

"Please, sir—" he said.

Muller was surprised to discover his competitor was a member of the clergy: an old man, a priest.

"Yes, Father?" he said.

"The ring—" faltered the priest. "I beg of you, sir—bid upon it no longer!"

Muller stared at the small man curiously.

"But really—" he began.

"It is of utmost importance. Believe me, sir. You cannot, *must not*—"

Muller roused suddenly to the realization that the auctioneer, hearing

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson



Muller raced forward and before he realized, was fifth party to the drama

no higher bid, had twice cried the sale of the ring to his competitor. "Going!" he was calling. "Going for one and a quarter—"

Barely in time, Muller stopped him: "Two!" he cried.

The auctioneer smiled and began shaking the new bid like a banner before his audience. The priest stared helplessly at Muller. "Please, sir!" he repeated. "You do not know. This ring, it is—" He turned abruptly. "Two and a half!" he called.

Muller stirred fretfully. "But why?" he demanded. "Why is it so important to you? You, a man of the cloth—what do you want with jewelry? What earthly reason—"

"I can't explain now," begged the priest. "There is no time. It is no earthly reason, but—another. You must not buy it. No one must buy the ring but myself. There is a history, a legend—"

He chose a poor argument. His words only succeeded in increasing Muller's desire to own the piece. He no longer doubted that the ring had indeed somehow found its way into this cheap auction-house from the erst-

while Kaiser's coffers. It was, perhaps, an imperial signet, or some rare and ancient *objet d'art*; possibly a notorious poison-ring from medieval days. Whatever its history or purpose, Muller was determined to have it if the price lay within his range.

Quietly he said: "I'm sorry, Father. But I too want the ring." And returning to the bench, "Three trillion!" he called. . . .

The little priest watched miserably as Muller went forward to claim his purchase, pressing through a crowd which hummed with pleased excitement. There is magic in numbers, and three trillions of marks sounded like a fabulous price—even though its true value was no more than thirty American dollars.

THE ring was a trifle large, but Muller wore it home. He and his wife rented a small furnished flat in a middle-class residential district. It was a wretched place, but the best they could afford. The drains were bad; the roof leaked when it rained; and the apartment was sadly in need of both painting and repapering. Muller

had mentioned these things several times to his landlord, but with no success. A firm demand might have brought results; but Muller was, in simple truth, rather afraid of the landlord, a fierce old rascal with brows like thunderclouds and great mustachios bristling with challenge.

The neighborhood, never better than mediocre, was not improved by postwar conditions. Everywhere was hunger and poverty, near-anarchy. Worst problem was that of the soldiers returned from the front. For four long years they had dwelt with death and violence; they did not now find it easy to compromise with a fate that brought worn heroes home to starve.

Freed of military restraint, they became a law unto themselves. When they disliked a thing, they spoke up openly and loudly against it. When they were angered, they did not argue—they struck. When they were hungry, they ate—where or how they got food was only their concern and that of those from whom they stole.

Thus it is not surprising that as Muller turned into his street, he heard

cries of anger and fear; and as he neared a tiny greengrocer's shop, he saw three ex-soldiers assaulting its owner, his neighbor.

WHAT is surprising is that Muller did something about it. In those days it was wisdom, under such circumstances, to bawl for the police, seek shelter from the thieves' vengeance, and hope for the best. Had Muller stopped to think twice, he might have done just that, for he was not a specially courageous man.

But it was instinct, not logic, which governed his reflexes. He raced suddenly forward, shouting as he ran, and before he himself realized what he was doing, he was fifth party to the little drama.

The bandits whirled, reaching for guns. But somehow it did not occur to Muller to be afraid. His brain was inflamed with a fierce and almost holy rage. It was as if some inner conviction of right imbued him with a power transcending petty fears. He knew a reckless, half-impatient contempt for his antagonists; for an instant understood the mad gallantry of *Don Quixote* striking spur against the whirling windsails, knew the impulse which caused de Bergerac, beset by a hundred hirelings, to laugh defiance at their blackguard blades, crying: "*Bring me giants!*"

Sheer impetus swept him forward, and before the nearest thug cried warning, Muller was upon him, in a single motion smashing the Luger from his grasp, scooping it up, and turning it against the befuddled trio. It occurred to him later that his speech and actions were like something from a very poor play.

"Drop your guns, all of you!" he cried. "And raise your hands. I'll shoot the first scoundrel who moves."

But melodrama or not, his command brought instant response. The thieves froze in their tracks, moving no muscle until the police came. The greengrocer, beside himself with gratitude, wept salty thanks.

He was, he could not deny, considerably set up over his little adventure. Rather complacently he conceded he had acquitted himself rather well in a difficult situation. As he climbed the steps to his flat, he was mentally reviewing the story he should tell Hilda—with proper modesty, to be sure, but at the same time making it quite clear that he had struck a neatly heroic figure in the action.

Unfortunately, his tale was delayed in the telling. Hilda met him at the door. She had been crying. Wordlessly she held forth a slip of paper, a cablegram from his New York employers. Or "erstwhile" employers; for that, in effect, was the cable's message. In crisp sentences it informed Muller

that effective immediately his guaranteed monthly salary was discontinued; that in the future he would be paid a flat word rate, and cable costs on such news items as were accepted.

Muller stared at the devastating notice, stricken. It meant for him, as he well knew, and as his employers must also have known, utter disaster. It was only the assurance of a regular income that enabled him to exist under Berlin's precarious economy; with such guarantee removed, he no longer had the means with which to buy his way into those furtive inner channels of diplomacy which were his news sources; such bribes became pure speculation. With the additional cost of prepaying cable fees which might—but might not!—be assumed at the other end, his entire job became a desperate gamble with fate that each week would offer at least one newsworthy story.

He wet dry lips. "When did this come?" he asked.

"An hour ago," said Hilda. Her white lips thinned to angry lines. "It's your own fault!" she accused. "You brought this on yourself. You, with your dreary stories of breadlines and riots, poverty, misery—"

"But it's the truth!" said Muller. "Those things exist. They are news."

"Not the news America wants to hear!" she retorted. "With them, the war is finished. They want to forget about it. They're not vengeful. They don't want to gloat forever over the downfall of a former enemy. I've told you all along you should send them bright, gay stories: Society comments, inside hints on Government scandals."

Muller only half heard her. His thoughts were seething at the rank injustice of this message. He neither would, nor wished to, argue with Hilda the truth of her accusations. All he knew was that a dreadful wrong had been done him. He had been a good correspondent, faithfully performing a newspaper man's proper function: that of reporting vital news events as he sees them.

To be thus cast to the wolves without being allowed to speak a word in his own behalf, suddenly roused in him a fury completely submerging his first sickening despair. His hands clenched tightly at his sides, and a strained, flushed hotness trembled through him. His anger was a wave that bore upon its crest defiance, and a sense of power illimitable.

He crumpled the cablegram in one fist, hurled it to the floor, and strode to the telephone.

"—your own fault!" complained Hilda, behind him. "If you had followed my advice—"

Muller spoke without turning. His voice was steel-cold. "Shut up!" he said. Then, to the operator's mur-

mured, "*Bitte?*" he requested: "Long distance—overseas division."

Hilda's face was white. Her eyes had widened, and she stood with the back of one hand pressed to her lips as if he had struck her. It occurred to Muller in a dim, abstracted fashion that, in effect, that was what he had done. Never before had he raised his voice to her in that manner. He was an easy-going man; he had been an easy-going, submissive husband. But no more.

Her lips worked mutely for a moment. Then, "What are you doing, Otto?" she asked. "Who are you calling?"

"New York."

"You—you're going to ask them to reconsider?"

He shook his head savagely. "No!" he said. "Damn them! I'm going to show them— Yes?" He turned back to the phone as the operator's voice informed him he had his first connection. "New York," he said.

HILDA started to speak, then said nothing. Muller knew what she was thinking. Only twice before had he ever spoken to New York, and then at the expense of his employers. The cost of such a call was tremendous; it loomed doubly so now his every source of income was cut off. Hilda knew how little ready cash they had on hand. Yet, her eyes fixed upon him in new, strange wonderment, she held her peace.

Muller did not call his old employers. He called, instead, a new syndicate of international renown. The call was pure madness. Muller was a very young journalist; theirs one of the oldest and greatest news-gathering organizations in the world. If they knew Muller's name at all, it was but slightly, for ninety per cent of his stories to America had appeared under the anonymous by-line: "*By cable; our Special Correspondent in Berlin.*"

Yet a miracle transpired that day. For not only did his call go through, but it found the ear of the Foreign Editor himself. He listened as Muller explained briefly who he was, his background, experience and his capabilities.

Then the editor spoke, and the impossible happened.

"Muller, eh?" he said. "Heard of you. Well, Muller, you called at just the right time. Two hours ago, in staff conference, we decided to resume German coverage on a pre-war basis. We're coördinating the activities of all our correspondents over there, and establishing a branch office in Berlin. Think you're capable of handling the job?"

Bring me giants!

"I am," said Muller calmly.

"Very well," said the cool, metallic voice. "We'll give you a try. Rent an office immediately, equip it, and send us an itemized account of expenses. We'll cable you the names of your new staff and an outline of your complete duties. Oh—by the way—about salary: The job pays a hundred a week."

"A hundred—"

"More if you make good, Muller," said his new employer. "Good-by."

And the connection was broken.

Muller turned to his wife, weak with belated recognition of his own daring, but transcendently happy. She read the triumph in his eyes and moved forward.

"Otto—" she said hesitantly. "Otto—"

He told her then—or started to. He didn't finish, for she moved still closer, laying her cheek against his. "I'm sorry, Otto," she whispered. "You were right. Forgive me, my dear."

IT was luck, of course—such a stroke of fortune as comes but once in a lifetime. Muller learned afterward that Henderby, the Foreign Editor, was one of those crisp Yankees who pride themselves on snap decisions. A spur-of-the-moment man! To that fact, and that the need for such a man as Muller had arisen two short hours before he had called, Muller owed his job.

On the strength of his newly won affluence, Muller gave up the old flat (after telling off the outraged landlord in no uncertain language), rented a new one in a better residential section, and transferred temporarily to a hotel until the new apartment should be ready for occupancy.

It was the first time in their married life that he and Hilda had been able to afford even the minor luxuries of existence. Hilda, thrilled as a bride, hurled herself joyfully into the task of furnishing a home to her heart's desire, as Muller turned himself to the equally pleasant job of setting up press headquarters.

A week later they moved into their new apartment. The promised repairs had not yet been quite completed. The woodwork had been repainted, the floors sanded and waxed until they glistened, but the paperhangers were a day behind schedule. The landlord apologized for this, blaming the decorator, an ancient Bavarian.

He in turn shrugged in the almost Gallic manner of South Germany and complained: "*Grosser Gott*—what can I do, with the labor situation what it is? Such worthless, good-for-nothing help I get these days—"

He jerked his head contemptuously toward a shiftless assistant lethargically setting the scaffold: A lean, pimply young man with sullen eyes.

Hilda laughed. "It doesn't matter, Otto. They'll be finished by tonight. And then we'll have our own lovely home—at last." She kissed him with the deft preoccupation of a wife whose thoughts are on more important matters. "Now, run along to work. I'll see you at suppertime."

"Yes," said Muller. "Good-by, my dear." Then, remembering, he stripped the ring from his finger. "By the way, if you should go down the street this afternoon, leave this with Pfeuger, the jeweler. It is a trifle large; I've almost lost it several times."

Then he went to his office.

He was surprised to find a visitor awaiting him. It was the little priest of the auction-house. He hurried forward eagerly as Muller entered.

"Herr Muller?" he said. "I'm so glad to find you—at last. I have been trying all over town to learn your name. The auctioneers didn't know, and it was terribly important that—" He stopped suddenly. His eyes, seeking Muller's hands, clouded. "The— the ring, Herr Muller?" he demanded. "You have lost it? Given it away?"

"No," said Muller. "The ring is at my home. It is to be repaired."

"Thank God!" said the priest. "It is about the ring that I have come. Herr Muller, please—it was three trillion marks you paid for the ring, was it not? That day I could not compete against you. But when necessity prods, even a priest must find money. I have scraped together all I could get—"

He drew from his pocket a tumbled pile of bills, set them on the desk between them beseechingly.

"Not *three*, but *ten* trillion, Herr Muller. Will you take it for the ring, accepting at once a handsome profit—and the thanks of an aged man?"

"But my dear sir," said Muller a bit impatiently, "I don't wish to sell the ring. It is not a question of money. I bought it because I liked it, wanted it. And besides, it has become a sort of—well, you might say good-luck piece—"

"*No!*" interrupted his visitor sharply. "You don't know what you're saying. Not good luck, no! The reverse."

"I beg your pardon?" said Muller querulously.

The small man sighed deeply, seeming to ponder deep within himself for a long moment.

"My son," he said at last, "I suppose I shall have to tell you. I did not want to, if it could be avoided. But since you refuse to part with the ring, I must tell you why I want it so desperately. Why neither you, nor any other man, must be permitted to hold it in his possession."

"Any man?" repeated Muller. "But you want it."

The old man met his gaze firmly. There was unwavering candor in his eyes and in his voice.

"Not for myself, my son. I want the ring in order that I may exorcise—and destroy it!"

Muller stared at him in blank bewilderment. There was something in the priest's tone which inveighed with all the dread solemnity of a High Mass.

"Exorcise—and destroy?" he repeated.

The priest nodded, choosing his words with deliberate care.

"What I am about to say, you may find strange, Herr Muller. We of the Church are straightforward men, living—or striving to—in the uncovert ways of righteousness and light. We attempt to discourage mysticism and superstition; these are false branches on the tree of knowledge.

"Yet we are not fools. We who have delved into the story of mankind know that all things are not easily explainable, that not all things are clean and godly. There stir in the world to-day, as in that Garden millennia ago, purposes dark and subtle, designed toward the overthrow of all that is good and noble in mankind.

"These are the forces of evil. Such a force is embodied in the ring you own."

"Force," said Muller, "embodied in an inanimate object? But, Father—"

The priest lifted a lean white hand in admonition.

BE not too swift to scoff, my son. We have ample reason to believe that some inanimate objects have a life peculiarly their own. The legend of the power of Solomon's Seal—which is to say Solomon's signet—is too widespread to brook easy dismissal. There was the rod of Moses, and the cup of Joseph of Arimathea, the Grail from which Our Lord drank on the last eve. These things are symbols of divine strength and truth. But they have their evil counterpart in—other things. The witches' broom, the necromancer's wand, and—the Ring of Judas."

"Ring of Judas?" repeated Muller.

The old man nodded soberly.

"That is what I have called it. Studying the ring's tragic history, I have traced its ownership—with many gaps—back through the centuries to that unhappy traitor. Where he got it, if from some still more ancient bearer of misery or no, I have no way of guessing.

"But since the day greed stirred Iscariot to sell earth's Savior for a slender purse of coins, the history of the ring's ownership is one of terrible grandeur and black tragedy.

"I do not know how many men have worn the ring. But certain names I *do* know, from writings I



*The old Bavarian
protested: "I did
not know him well.
He was new."*

have read, from ancient paintings whereupon is depicted the serpentine coil of power: Cæsar Augustus, Tiberius and Nero—these one time owned the ring. Later, fierce Attila, Saladin and Genghis Khan.

"Philip of Spain wore the ring when his golden galleons scoured the Seven Seas. It weighted the Prussian Frederick's rheumy fingers when he set a world ablaze, and its evil aura inspired Napoleon to conquest—and destruction. Lately, as the auctioneer truly told, it was the possession of Wilhelm of Hohenzollern. And today," he finished somberly, "the ring is yours—and the evil power thereof."

"But the power of this ring?" asked Muller. "What is this evil?"

"Must you ask, my son? Do you not see the dreadful parallel in the lives of all those men? This is the curse of Iscariot's ring; that he who wears it shall aspire and win to world-shaking greatness. The strength to sway men's

minds is his, and power illimitable with which to achieve his purposes.

"But always, at the end, shall this power be warped to a design of grief and misery for mankind. And as for the owner himself, his life shall end in violent death or bleak despair."

MULLER stared at the old man. The story was incredible, of course. Fantastic. Or—was it? Muller found himself recalling suddenly the small but curious incidents which had befallen him recently.

There was that episode with the thieves. Never before in his life had he known such vast, almost contemptuous sense of power as during that short interlude. Then his relationship with Hilda, which during this past week had subtly changed somehow. A small thing, but it was he who directed, now; she who obeyed.

More important, there was the matter of his new job, its winning and its

scope. . . . Power. . . . Power not measurable in world-shaking emphasis yet, true. But—later?

Reluctantly he found himself acknowledging there might be something in what the old priest warned. It occurred to him suddenly that today, for the first time since he had won and worn the ring, he felt more placid. During the past week he had felt possessed of a strange new confidence in himself; in his judgment, his capabilities, an almost headstrong cocksureness of his own rightness in all things. Was this the power of the ring? Muller did not know. But a gathering doubt warned him that it was.

There was another point—irrelevant, perhaps, but significant: the purchase-price of the ring. A fantastic price of three trillion marks. It had no apparent analogy in the ring's history. But when one stopped to consider it, that sum—translated into older terms—amounted to precisely the

amount for which the ring's first owner had sold the life of his Friend. Thirty pieces of silver!

It was this last thought which made Muller's decision for him. He was not a specially devout man, but he tried to be logical. And it seemed to him that here was too much evidence to be lightly dismissed.

By acceding to the old priest's request, he had nothing to lose, but—perhaps—everything to gain. If the ring were, in truth, a ring of power, it had achieved enough of its purpose for him. He held now all the rank and authority to which he aspired. He felt no urge to become a molder of destinies.

He nodded. "Very well, Father," he said. "I don't pretend to understand, and I'm not sure I believe—quite. But you shall have the ring."

At Muller's apartment they found Hilda wearily but happily erasing the last vestiges of the decorator's labors. She was embarrassed at meeting a clergyman in her dishabille, but Muller cut short her apologies.

"The ring, Hilda? Did you take it to Pfeuger?"

"Not yet. I had planned to go later this afternoon. I'll get it for you."

SHE disappeared into the bedroom recently cleared by the old Bavarian, who was now methodically removing the paraphernalia of his trade. She returned in a moment, puzzled.

"It doesn't seem to be there, Otto."

"It must be there," said Muller.

"I know. I put it on the bureau. I remember perfectly."

"It can't have grown legs and walked away," Muller said impatiently. "There's been no one in the house but you and—"

He nodded toward the old paperhanger, who shuffled forward.

"Your good wife is right, Herr Muller," he said. "It was on the bureau. I saw it myself, when my assistant—"

He stopped suddenly, his old eyes abruptly clouding. Muller read the meaning of his hesitation.

"Yes? Your assistant. Where is he?"

"He is—gone," said the old man.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"I don't know. This was his last day with me. He was going home—somewhere in the south of Germany."

"Then he took it!" stormed Muller.

"He is a common, pilfering thief!"

The old Bavarian twisted his hands in honest agony. "Maybe so, Herr Muller. I cannot say. I did not know him well. He was a new man . . . an ex-soldier. We cannot pick and choose these days."

"Of course," interrupted the priest gently. "It is not your fault, my friend. But we must find him, get back the ring. Where was his home?"

The old man shook his head. "That I do not know."

"But confound it," said Muller, "you must have known something about him. *Who* is he? We'll set the police after him. What was his name?"

The Bavarian whined: "It is not my fault, Herr Muller. I am sorry. I will pay for the ring. I did not know—"

"His name, old windbag! Tell us!"

"Name?" said the old man. "Ah, yes—his name. *Ach*, he is a bad one. I curse the day I ever laid eyes on him. Dirty little thief! His name? His name is Shickelgruber. But lately he calls himself Adolf Heitzler or Hitler or something like that."

Bond's Next

AS I stood talking with Dumbo the stableman, a voice lifted in sudden raucous song from the next stall: "*Curry me back to old Ginny*—"

"Hey!" I demanded. "Who's in there? A horse? A talking horse? It aint that Egbert Haw I read about in a magazine?"

Dumbo's ears wagged negatively. "I don't know nothin' about no talkin' horses. He aint exactly a man, neither. He's sort of—well, sort of peculiar."

I strode to the other stall. Leaning with folded arms over the lower gate was a glinty-eyed little rascal with a fringe of chin-whiskers and an impy grin. He had the body of a man down as far as his floating ribs. From there on he was a *horse*!

"Well," said the centaur, "when do I make with the hoofs? I'm gettin' tired of standin' around here like a stuffed owl."

"You mean," I said, "you want to *race*? Can you run?"

"Can I run!" he snorted. "Can I run? Listen, pal, I'm the fastest thing on four legs you ever saw. Why, I gave the Minotaur a ten-mile start an' beat him from East Phrygia to Peiraeus by the Marathon route. I'm Greece lightning! I run faster than a lisle stocking. Ever hear of the 'Trudin' Horse'? I'm the one who made him look slow. I can out-race, out-drink an' out-smart any equine you ever heard of!"

"And out-brag," I added, "any I ever heard, period. But okay. If the Commission'll stand for it, I'll play ball." (Nelson Bond goes on from there next month.)



*The Ring of Judas!
Its history was one
of terrible grandeur
and black tragedy.*

Skirt Patrol

THE SOUL-SHAKING EVENTS WHEREIN OOKIE THE ANGEL-PUSS SPREADS DISCORD AMONG GOLDBRICK, Jo-Jo, THE JEEP AND SUNDRY OTHER STALWARTS OF B COMPANY.

by Forbes Parkhill



BEFORE my number was called, the notion taken me I knewed all they is to know about skirt patrol," the melancholy infantryman confided to the motherly USO senior hostess as he gently fingered a moused eye. "I was a ice-man."

Elbow angled on knee, he sat in a corner of the downtown Service Men's Center. With the cynical air of a sophisticate contemplating an about-face in the march of civilization, he disdainfully regarded his care-free comrades on week-end leave from the Splinter City cantonment blithely juking with the junior hostesses.

"No'm, thanks. I'm of no mind to dance," he responded gloomily to her solicitous endeavor to ease him into the gay camaraderie of the occasion. "I'm off of dames. Dames is somebody you spend your moola fattening up for some other Joe. Dames is somebody you fall for, and it gives you the miseries to think about, and you cannot sleep good; and when you are on leave you cannot eat or drink much, account they keep you broke. Dames is somebody you proposition 'em for a date is lightning on the by-pass, except it's pay-day. Like Ookie."

The senior hostess seated herself by his side, determined to blitz his khaki blues.

"Crossed up in love?" he echoed bitterly in response to her adroit question. "What is love? The tenth word in a telegram. I am fixing to stay the way I was born, unmarried. Especially with Ookie."

With an anguished shudder he rejected her suggestion that he'd feel better after a free cup of coffee and a dog on a bun. One-half his expression of pained reproach, due to his discolored eye, registered as a dismal leer.

"No'm. No more dogs. The thought aches me. Ookie is a dog-jockey, a car-hop in a drive-in snackerie. Wears a cowgirl costume that shows dimpled knees and hides a heart of dry ice. Juggles trays in a hamburger joint called the Dog House. 'Tis a place I often been in."

Overflowing understanding sympathy, the hostess besought him to reveal all...

Her name is Katie Fay (he told her) so everybody calls her Ookie. Wears cowboy boots, a six-gallon hat and a chisel, and spreads discord amongst our armed forces. An angel-puss with new-penny hair spilling over one catch-as-catch-can eye. Dazzles you with a come-and-get-it smile to camouflage a come-on-sucker soul.

Ookie is like a recruiting sergeant, always looking for fresh meat. Does Uncle Sam want to win this war, he better do something about Ookie. And not too little and too late, or pretty quick she taken the rest of the Army like she taken the Jeep.

The Jeep is a good soldier, like anybody out of B Company, up to the first time he stops at the Dog House with his pal and looks up into Ookie's cooperative eyes and gets taken suddenly romantic. When first she warbles, soft and fluttery, "Howsit, Joe? Sinkers and suds?" her words curl right around his sunburned neck and tickle him under the chin. He giggles and orders a bowl of fire, and sets blinking with his jaw unhinged until she brings him his chili, and crimsons up and giggles and says, friendly as a wet dog: "My name is not Joe, and what are you doing tonight, sugar?"

His pal tells her: "We call him the Jeep, account he's little and noisy and tough and fast." His pal is extremely smart and handsome and has a way with women, being a lush spender.

A come-and-get-it smile to camouflage a come-on-sucker soul, and a heart of dry ice.

The Jeep giggles and says: "His name is Goldbrick, and I could tell you why, sugarpuss, only he is my buddy."

Ookie puckers up her red lips doubtful as she eyes his bowl of odds and ends so to show her he cares naught for expense the Jeep quick orders loganberry à la mode, and she lyrics:

"Could be, Joe. Ted Weems is playing at Dreamland tonight." She pulls a dimple on Goldbrick and hints: "I got a friend."

"So have I," says Goldbrick, being smarter than the Jeep. "Guy out of A Company, name of Jo-jo. Thinks he is plenty hot at Mississippi marbles.

Tonight I am fixing to take him for at least three bucks."

That is how the Jeep dunks his way into the toils of Ookie and for the next three weeks is promising almost every dog-face in B Company that the day the eagle screams he will sure pay back the fins he put the bite on them for. When he is not marching around with a faraway look he is giggling at something he thought about and forgetting to salute some missing link and winding up dreaming the happy hours away on K. P. That is the way love taken a guy.

THEN the Jeep comes to his pal, terribly upset, and says: "Goldbrick, you are smarter than me. You got to help me out of a jam. Something awful has happened. I gotten my whiskers caught in the wringer. Ookie is off of me like the hide off a skinless wiener."

"Swell," says Goldbrick, heartless. "Now you can pay me the \$6.40 you borrowed me out of."

"You do not understand, Goldbrick," says the Jeep. "This is serious. If somebody does not do something, with Ookie I will be in the tub, all washed up."

"So what?" says Goldbrick, unfeeling. "You will catch up on a heap of sleep. You will save your bucks and get rich, Jeep. A dame is only a date, and you will learn yourself to take 'em or leave 'em, like me."

"Ookie claims she seen me and you at the Bijou with a couple janes last night." The Jeep sighs and adds: "She is fearful fetching when she pouts."

"You shouldn't hold a jane's hand," advises Goldbrick, "in a pitcher show."

"I didn't," denies the Jeep, indignant. "She held mine."

"I know," says Goldbrick, cagey. "In self-defense. What you tell Ookie?"

"Nothing. Started to tell her 'twas all a tragical mistake, but she wasn't there any more."

"Okay," says Goldbrick. "I am smarter than you. Leave it to me."

So Goldbrick drops in at the Dog House; and when Ookie says "Howsit, Joe? Ham on rye?" he says, "Listen, baby. The way you do your hair, you are a dead ringer for Veronica Lake, who is a movie actress I seen at the Bijou last night. I'll take a wimpy de-luxe, without. I was double-dating with a punk, Jo-jo, out of A Company; and I says to Jo-jo, 'Speaking of dead ringers, Jo-jo—'"

"I get it, Joe," Ookie interrupts, sundae-smooth. "Does Jo-jo giggle?"

"My name is not Joe," he tells her. "They call me Goldbrick. But you can call me Goldie, bright-eyes."

"Okay, Joe," she says. "So you were at the Bijou, and you says to this Clark Gable dog-face—"

"I says to Jo-jo, 'Speaking of dead ringers, Jo-jo, if you can hang loose of that blonde soldier-bait's hand long enough to listen, Jo-jo, you are a dead ringer for a pal of mine, called the Jeep.'"

"That one," says Ookie, very gum-droppy, "is strictly off the cob, Joe. I will believe it when I see this Jo-jo in person."

"So," Goldbrick tells the Jeep when he gets back to Splinter City, "I fixed everything up for you, Jeep."

got to act as unlike your own self as possible. Smart. Refined. Gentlemanly. Like me."

"Sounds like a crackpot idea to me," crabs the Jeep.

"Above all, remember not to giggle," says Goldbrick as he starts to work on his pal with the eyebrow pencil. "If you feel it coming on, go 'Ho, oh!' instead." Goldbrick steps back for a look at his pal's penciled pan, and hauls off and knocks the Jeep flat on his back.



"Ycah?" says the Jeep, doubtful. "You mean, Goldbrick, that you are fixing to take Jo-jo to the Dog House and tell Ookie—"

"It is too bad you are dumb," Goldbrick tells the Jeep. "You are going to be Jo-jo. See?"

"Me?" squeals the Jeep. "Maybe I am not as smart as you, Goldbrick, but I am not dumb enough to—"

"Listen, jinglebrains," says Goldbrick, patient. "The uniform makes all soldiers look alike, don't it? Especially where it is dark, like in pitcher shows. And Ookie mistakened Jo-jo for you account you look so much alike. See?"

"Look alike?" grouches the Jeep. "If I had a pan like Jo-jo—"

"Leave that to me, dumbskull. I will get you back on the beam. I have bought some stuff to make your face look human. Eyebrow pencil. Mascara."

"Mascara?" asks the Jeep, who hadn't been around much.

"The stuff that comes off on a guy's cheek," Goldbrick explains. "You

"What is that for?" asks the Jeep as he climbs to his feet holding his swelling eye.

"Just an afterthought," explains Goldbrick. "Didn't think you looked different enough. Now you'll do."

"Thanks, pal," says the Jeep. "That is something I am too dumb to have ever thought of, Goldbrick."

So that night they drop in at the Dog House and Ookie comes up to their booth and says to Goldbrick, "Howsit, Joe? Dunkers and a black one?" She turns to the redrawn Jeep and starts to say, "Howsit, Joe? Double or nothing?" but sort of chokes and blinks and stands with her hands on her hips a second, and then says, "Well, who let you in, you lug? Didn't I tell you—"

GOLDBRICK quick interrupts with, "Listen, cuddles. We come here looking for the Jeep. Seen him anywhere?"

"Seen him?" Ookie explodes like a blowout. "Are you nuts, Joe?" She sets down her tray careful and sticks

out her chin dimple at the Jeep and studies his shiner careful. "Tomcatting around again, eh? Well, I told you what to expect if I ever caught you here again." And she slaps him across his better eye and he scrooches back in his seat, his mind cobwebby,

"Jo-jo," Goldbrick explains, "is not as dumb as he looks, sweetheart. Fact is, he is a bearcat among the ladies. A big dame hunter."

"A wolf," asks Ookie, saucer-eyed, "in Jeep's clothing?"

"You would not believe it to look at him, honey gal," Goldbrick says, "but he is a awful fast worker. You should of seen Jo-jo the other night when me and him was double-dating at the Bijou. The way he carried on was something scandalous. I was

"You wouldn't say that, Joe, if you were wise to all the nasty things he said about this Joe," and she jerks her pink thumb at Goldbrick.

"What did he say about me, gorgeous?" asks Goldbrick, suspicious.

"Oh, nothing much. Only that if you were half as smart as you make out to be, Joe, you would be wearing a top-kick's stripes. Just that he was getting awful fed up on your gosh-awful, endless blah-blah-blah. Merely that a droop like you oughta—"

"Is—that—so?" says Goldbrick, with a terrible glare at the Jeep.

"I NEVER—" the Jeep squawks, and then swallows quick and goes on: "I never drempt good old Jeep would say such things, Miss Ookie. I can't believe it."

"I didn't either, when I first heard it," mews Ookie, "account that is no way for a pal to talk behind his buddy's back. I says to him, 'Joe, if that's the way you feel about Goldbrick, why don't you tell him so to his face?'" And she goes on to tell a lot more outrageous things that she says the Jeep said about Goldbrick.

"I—I got to be going," says the Jeep, squirming. "I just remember I got to see a sergeant about—"

"—about going on sick report tomorrow," rasps Goldbrick. "Yeah, babe, we got to be going. Me and Jo-jo have got something to talk about, personal."

"Stick around," chirps Ookie. "The Jeep ought to be here 'most any time. I thought you Joes wanted to see him. I would like to see him, my own self."

"I can't dope out, cutie pan," Goldbrick tells her, plenty sour, "what you can see in that goof, the Jeep. His face would stop a tank, and all he gotten in his pockets is fishhooks, and he dances like a shoat on crutches."

"You said it, Joe," agrees Ookie, and the Jeep begins to bristle up but before he can say anything she hands him an oo-la-la look and tickles him under the chin with more sirupy words. "I bet you are a super rug-cutter, Joe."

"Huh?" croaks the dithered Jeep. "Well, Miss Ookie, not so bad. Not so bad."

She goes on, kind of dreamy and far-away, "I bet you could go good to Ted Weems' torch stuff, Joe. You ever been out to Dreamland, Joe?"

Quick, before Goldbrick could crack nasty, the Jeep says, "It's a date, lovely," and all the way back to Splinter City on the bus him and Goldbrick have the most fearful argument. The Jeep says, "'Twas all a terrible mistake, pal, and I swear I never said such things about you, and if you will kindly give me the loan of another fin I will pay it back on pay-day, on the word of a gentleman." And Gold-



"Well, who let you in, you lug?" says Ookie.

and the only thing he can think of is to giggle, but Goldbrick lets fly at his shin under the table and he sets up sudden and groans, "Ho, oh!"

"The joke is on you, beautiful," Goldbrick tells Ookie with a cushy smile. "Allow me to present my pal out of A Company. We call him Jo-jo."

"That's right," booms the Jeep in a deep, unnatural voice. "The name is Jo-jo. Pleased to meet you, Miss—uh, what did you say the name was?"

"Well," gurgles Ookie, molasses-slow, "I'll—be—a—"

"Remarkable resemblance there—eh, lamb-pie?" Goldbrick remarks. "That's why I brought him along. Wanted him to see the Jeep. Jo-jo, my friend, this sweet dish is Katie Fay, so they call her Ookie."

"How do you do, Miss Ookie?" The Jeep was most restrained and dignified. "Pleasant evening."

"Yeah," she murmurs, giving him the gimlet eye, like a robin sizing up a worm. "A body wouldn't believe there could be two faces like that!"

scared somebody might think it was the Jeep, they look so much alike."

"Yeah," drawls Ookie. "Yeah, they look alike, Joe. Had me stymied, at first. At first I thought this Joe was the Jeep."

The Jeep feels so relieved to think that the scheme is clicking that he starts to giggle, but quick says "Ouch!" and sets up straight and laughs, "Ho, oh!" and smirks at her and says, "Miss Ookie, everybody calls me Jo-jo, but if you want, you can call me just plain Joe."

"Okay, Joe," says Ookie. "Anybody can see you're different from that two-timing snake-in-the-grass, the Jeep."

The Jeep says: "Oh, now, Miss Ookie, I shouldn't say that. I have met this guy you call the Jeep and I think he is a swell guy."

"Cherub-cheeks," Goldbrick tells her, "I should think any jane could go for a swell guy like the Jeep."

"Yeah," says Ookie, "if he is not too much like him."

"I think he is a man among men," fumes the Jeep.

brick says, "Okay, but only if you can get a gentleman to guarantee it," and one thing leads to another until the tough M. P. on the bus says if they don't pipe down he'll be forced to take measures.

Anyway, as the Jeep saw the set-up, what was the odds if Ookie mistaken him for Jo-jo as long as she went steady with him? When he and Ookie got to Dreamland, he finds Goldbrick lone-wolfing it with an evil grin in his eye. The Jeep doesn't think much about it for the first six-seven dances, his mind being on acting like he was Jo-jo and dancing graceful, and thinking about the bunch of mercenary heels in B Company that he had put the bite on for only two shekels, which does not take you very far at Dreamland.

But after awhile it begins to get on his nerves to see Goldbrick dancing past with different patooties, always with that nasty grin, so he happens to mention to Ookie the real reason everybody in B Company calls Goldbrick Goldbrick.

"And the heels think the only reason a doll goes for a guy is account he is a good spender," he adds.

"I could go for a double-rich frosted mint, Joe," she murmurs, soft.

The Jeep is down to forty cents, so he says, "I am not feeling so very good, baby. Something aches me, right here. Maybe we better be going, after this one."

She doesn't seem to hear him, account of watching Goldbrick. "He certainly is not any Victor Mature," she admits. "You say he is a good spender, Joe?"

"He is pure poison," snorts the Jeep. "Can you feature somebody that gotten more lettuce than all the rest of B Company put together, and will not stake a pal to a fin, when pay-day is only next Wednesday?"

"So that's the kind of a Joe he is, Joe?" sneers Ookie, and the music stops and there is Goldbrick, practically underfoot.

Ookie smiles a big smile at him and says, "Howsit, Joe? Think of finding you here! Your pal, here, is taken with a cramp and got to go back to Splinter City, poor guy, and I know you will not mind taking poor little me home, will you, Joe—after while?" To the Jeep she says: "Try an ice pack on it, Joe."

HAD he got more than forty cents left, the Jeep might have made something of it, even with M. P.'s on the floor. As it is, it is one way out of a jam, so he grits his teeth and swallows and says:

"Okay, booful. Be seeing you tomorrow night."

"Not tomorrow, Joe," trills Ookie as she dances away with that nasty-grinning Goldbrick. "Wednesday."

So that is the way the Jeep is dusted off, and a beautiful palship is broken up. The Jeep and Goldbrick do not speak to one another any more, and Goldbrick gives Ookie an awful play,

night after night, and the Jeep is as low as a duck's bottom.

Though the Jeep is not very smart, after awhile he figures out he was wrong in the first place to take the advice of a sharpshooter, and he would have done better to play fair and square with Ookie and avoid deception. So he hunts up the real Jo-jo and explains how it was that Ookie gotten off of him in the first place and asks him, please, will he be a pal and go tell her that he, Jo-jo, was the guy she seen holding hands with the jane that night in the Bijou.

"Don't be a chump," says Jo-jo, who has been around and is steel-hard and razor-sharp, with no more feelings than a draft board. "A guy that blows his top over a lapful of soldier bail is nuts, Jeep. All these janes is good for is to blow your dough, soldier." With money, Jo-jo is as close as 5 minutes to 11.

"Not Ookie," says the Jeep. "All but Ookie."

"Dames is all alike," Jo-jo tells him. "Pocket twisters. Dames don't get a guy anywheres. They look innocent. So does poison ivy. Forget all about it, Jeep. Take up something that will get you somewheres. I will learn you to play Harlem cricket."

But the Jeep is persistent. "All you got to do, Jo-jo, is to string along to the Dog House with me, and say 'Yeah' when I tell Ookie you are the lug she saw at the Bijou."

"Not in a million years," says Jo-jo, blowing on his dominoes. "I got where I am today by laying off of women. If it got noised about that I admitted playing handies with a dame, I wouldn't dast look A Company in the face again."

"Aint you got sentiment?" asks the Jeep. "Aint there anything that will touch your heart, Jo-jo?"

"Yeah," says Jo-jo. "Money."

*Illustrated by
Frederic Anderson*



Goldbrick and Jo-jo mash one another up that night, behind barracks.

"I was scared of that," sighs the Jeep. "Okay, then. You do like I say, and it will get you a fin, come Wednesday."

So the Jeep and the real Jo-jø go to the Dog House and Ookie gives them the lightning gander and passes by their booth with her nose on aircraft spotting patrol and marches straight to the booth where the Jeep has not suspicioned Goldbrick is waiting.

"Howsit, Joe?" they hear her say. "Roast two on a slice of squeal?"

"Unchain one, honeychile," says Goldbrick, "and draw one in the dark."

"I'll be ready at eight o'clock tonight, Joe," she purrs.

"Why, uh," Goldbrick stutters, "can we just as easy make it Wednesday night, flame-thrower?"

"Okay, Joe," says Ookie, but hard. "Another dame, huh?"

"Honest, cookie," Goldbrick tells her, "there is not any other dame in my life. You believe me, don't you?"

"I know soldiers," says Ookie, like sand in your sugar.

"Listen, toots," pleads Goldbrick. "You got me wrong. I been taken to the cleaners by a knucklebone sharp out of A Company. I will be dough-heavy again Wednesday. Honest."

"I heard that one, too," says Ookie. "Who is this elbow-shaker, Joe?"

"A ration-spoiler name of Jo-jø," says Goldbrick, and then of course he has to explain that it is not the guy she knows as Jo-jø, but the real Jo-jø. And before he is through he has told all about how the Jeep had palmed himself off as Jo-jø, only he says 'twas the Jeep's idea all along. "I was jinxed," he says, "or else this Jo-jø is a very lucky guy. He win half the dough in the battalion."

"He did, did he?" says Ookie, quiet and thoughtful.

"Listen, heart-throb," says Goldbrick. "You aren't going to let a little thing like this come between us, are you? You go for me like you always did, don't you, steady?"

"Sure I do, Joe," twitters Ookie, "but what does this guy, Jo-jø, look like anyway?"

"Jo-jø is a terrible-looking mug," sneers Goldbrick. "His face is even worse to take than the Jeep's. He is a hard guy, with ice-cold lemonade in his veins, sour. He has a hate on dames."

"Be sceeing you, Joe," she smiles at him and trips away, straight to the booth where the Jeep and Jo-jø are setting, and she beams at Jo-jø, honey-sweet.

"Howsit, Joe? Dress one pig and drown it?"

Timidly the Jeep puts in, giggling, "Hiya, Ookie."



"I could go for a frosted mint," Ookie murmurs. The Jeep, down to forty cents, says, "I am not feeling so good."

"Howsit, Joe?" she tells him, as cordial as if he had the smallpox. "The ice pack help that cramp any?"

"You think I am somebody besides who I am, Ookie," he says. "I am—"

But that honeyfugling Ookie is bending over Jo-jø, purring, "I hope you don't mind if I call you Joe, for short."

"Listen, Ookie," the Jeep is saying. "I am not who you think I am. I am the Jeep. Remember? I—"

She is leaning over Jo-jø, spreading the old apple butter. "I bet you swing it swell, don't you, Joe?"

"I do not dance," says Jo-jø, hard as nails. "I never even learnt how."

"Listen, Ookie," the Jeep is pleading. "That was not me you seen that night at the Bijou. It was—"

But Ookie does not hear him, being leaning on the table on her elbows to get an upward look into Jo-jø's iceberg eyes. "Then I will learn you how to dance, Joe," she tells him.

"Nix, sister," says Jo-jø, not quite so hard. "I know when I'm well off—"

"Listen, Ookie," breaks in the Jeep, desperate. "Listen—"

"At Dreamland, Joe," whispers Ookie, snuggling up so her new-penny

hair lays all shiny on Jo-jø's shoulder.

"We-ell," says Jo-jø, and that is how Ookie dusts off both the Jeep and Goldbrick for Jo-jø. Except that Goldbrick takes it awful hard, and lays for Jo-jø behind the barracks that night when he comes back from Dreamland, and they have it out, and mash up one another's face something fearful, but Jo-jø keeps right on going steady with Ookie. As for the Jeep and Goldbrick, with Ookie out of their life for good and all, there is nothing more to wrangle over and they no longer get along like a cat and a goldfish.

"AND that, ma'am," (the soldier concluded despondently) "is why I'm broke—and off of dames for life."

"Tsk, ts, ts!" clucked the senior hostess sympathetically. "But you mustn't let your experience warp your outlook on life, or your opinion of all women, Private—what did you say your name is? Goodness, you've forgotten the most important part of the story! Tell me—are you the Jeep, or are you Goldbrick?"

"Me, ma'am?" answered the embittered soldier. "Why, I am Jo-jø."

DAVID BRYCE fervently hoped he would never be anything but twenty-two. It was an age one should never pass. Twenty-one had been a washout; and Steve had gone; and his going had left a cold hollow fear. The attainment of majority had simply meant that David must assume all worldly obligations, legal responsibilities and declare a loyalty to a political party. Twenty-one produced a frightening period, when one stepped across a chasm between the uncertainty of adolescence and the heart-stopping status where you no longer hid behind the irresponsibility of youth.

It was grand to be twenty-two—the golden age where a man is at his physical peak, undaunted by the threats of failure. Not that one shirked responsibilities, for they were all there in their knife-edged facets; but responsibilities at twenty-two were mere goals or pinnacles of attainment. It was like being part of all this and finding oneself a member of the first Air Corps squadron trusted to fly the new Rapier fighter.

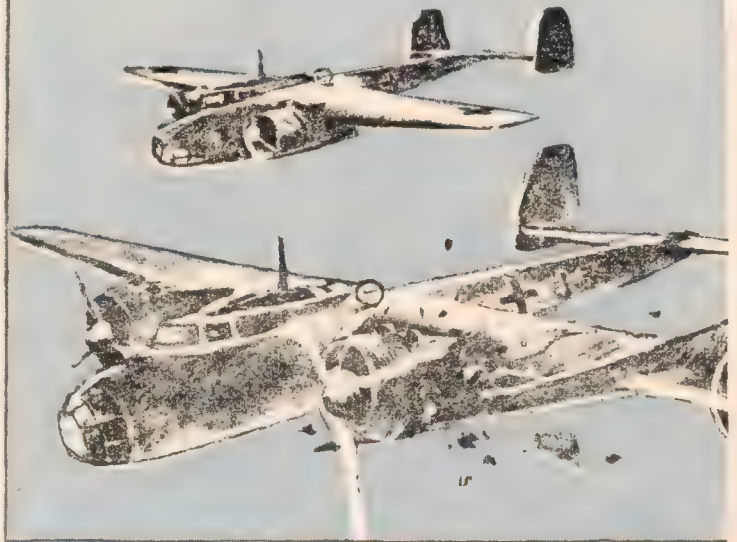
All that, and then falling in love with Dinky Draper, can happen only to guys of twenty-two.

Bryce had heard about the Rapier the day he was graduated from primary training at Randolph Field. General Arnold had mentioned it cautiously, with that gay twinkle in his blue eyes. But that was when Bryce was twenty-one, and things are beyond reach at that age. The General had spoken of the Rapier, but he had also mentioned a new bomber and something about a hush-hush air-cannon. They were always saying things like that to lads of twenty-one on graduation; but no one ever expected to see a Rapier. The Brass Hats were always promising things—at pass-out ceremonies.

But today David was twenty-two, and he was flying a Rapier on defensive patrol. He stared ahead at the one bearing the flight-leader's markings. That was Captain Jeff Sprague.

Sprague was twenty-eight and a flight commander, but he wasn't twenty-two. The Skipper was an old man, with none of the enthusiasm for new equipment. He'd probably experienced all that back in '38 when he was first allowed to try out one of the latest P-36's. That was a long time ago. Sprague had probably forgotten what it felt like to be twenty-two. The Captain couldn't see the beauty of the Rapier or sense the ecstasy of flying something that might be faster than anything else in the world. He couldn't appreciate the satisfaction of sitting behind a power-plant that was

An old fellow of twenty-eight may be cautious in an air-battle; but a man of twenty-two is still in his prime.



What You Do

revolutionizing aerial warfare, or glory in the battery of heavy-caliber guns so beautifully faired into the Rapier's wing.

You had to be twenty-two—with enthusiasm, not with responsibility—to appreciate all these things.

JEFF SPRAGUE was a broad-shouldered man who fitted the Rapier's cockpit so snugly that he sometimes wondered. He cursed his luck that he should draw a ship like this. The Air Force overseas could provide P-40's, Lightnings, Airacobras or even Thunderbolts; but he had to be tagged for Rapiers! Sure, the Rapier had everything, and then some—but what could you do about it? You couldn't go across the Ditch and raise hell. You couldn't take chances on offensive sweeps. You couldn't escort bombers like the other guys, and run

up a record. You were flying a Rapier, and Rapiers were very new and very hush-hush; and any guy taking chances that might let the enemy get possession of a Rapier and its secrets was taking plenty chances with his bars.

There's little enthusiasm at twenty-eight. At twenty-eight you're getting old; and a captaincy at twenty-eight isn't even peanuts in a first-class war. There're two ways of getting promotion in war-time, and the other one doesn't matter. You don't get chest hardware, and you certainly can't get Messerschmitts or Junkers, wet-nursing a new type—and I mean a *new* type.

But not only Rapiers: Sprague was saddled with young Bryce and Ken Harkness. Bryce was still shuddering at the thoughts of what had happened to his brother. That would be Steve



by Arch Whitehouse

-at Twenty-two

Bryce, a service test-pilot who had pulled the wings off a Maverick P-50 at Farmingdale. That would have been all right, only his 'chute hadn't opened. Young Bryce openly quaked every time he snapped his harness on. Sprague knew young Bryce would never take chances—not even on defensive patrols.

Harkness was more mature. Twenty-four or so, and a good pilot at that. But Harkness was one of these engineering M.I.T. guys who figured things on a slide-rule, and tried to run his world by tables and mathematics. Harkness wasn't a fighter pilot. He could always prove that certain stresses were too risky in certain combat maneuvers. To Harkness, a new Rapier was just another mathematical experiment—like a new micrometer or an armament formula sent over by the R.A.F. research mob.

The first time Harkness flew a Rapier, he went up with fifty rounds and did a test dive on a drogue target. He got mad when he came down and discovered he had put forty-two rounds into the sleeve, and spent nearly a week trying to figure out why the other eight missed. Sprague wondered whether Ken would worry that much if he missed a Focke-Wulf 190 the first time he let drive at one.

Harkness was sensitive, too. He worried about young Bryce, and tried to erase that parachute business from his mind. The gesture was overdone, and Dave resented it. He resented everything about Harkness. There was the unconsciously superior air he assumed when they talked about the hush-hush features of the Rapier. Ken explained why the supercharger was on the secret list, and tried to scribble out the formula of the new alloy that

went into the impeller vane. There was another lecture on the clever staggering of the guns and the ammunition feeds, which allowed two extra guns in a wing that had no greater span than a Spitfire.

Sprague broke it up one day with: "Never mind all that. You can't get out and fix it at operating height. All we have to remember is not to be sucked in too far, so that we put one down on an occupied field for these Nazi guys to go over. They're the orders, and we're elected!"

Major Merrill again reminded them that some R.A.F. dope had put a brand-new Mosquito bomber down on a Swiss field a few days before, and that there was hell to pay about it.

"We won't get Heinies out of this," grumbled Sprague. "All we'll get is flying-hours, and you can get those ferrying bombers—and with better pay!"

The three gleaming Rapiers huddled in closer as Captain Sprague swung them clear of the restricted area around Woolwich. Then he wagged his wings, and both Harkness and Bryce listened in on their sets.

Sprague was getting a warning from their Operations shed.

"To No. 1 Section. Claridge to No. 1 Section. . . . Formation enemy Dornier 17-Z's attacking Gravesend loading docks. Twelve-plus at least. Take it, Section 1."

"Get that, you guys?" demanded Sprague.

Harkness came up with: "Dornier 17-Z's, Cappy? They're the new four-place jobs superseding the DO-115's. They have six guns and can sure hand it out!"

"Good! So can we! You stick tight with me, Bryce."

"She has a belly turret, and guns firing from ports on each side," Harkness rattled on.

Bryce was glad he was twenty-two now. All he had to worry about was to hold his position and bang away at every target that slipped across his sights. That's all there was to it. Sprague had to worry about how far they went, and Harkness was stewing about belly guns, and turrets set in the sides of a new German bomber. Who cared? They were flying Rapiers, and nothing could keep up with a Rapier—and they didn't have to go too far over. This could be a real birthday party.

SPRAGUE brought them around smartly; the three fighters hoisted their port wings against the late afternoon sunlight, patted the glare off and went screaming away for Gravesend. The river below wriggled and seemed to throw a matted carpet of flotsam up on its banks, and the tangle became something one studied on an aerial photo. A few lazy blobs hung disconsolately from their curved cables, and in the patchwork pattern below were dozens of kite-balloon winches mounted on lorries with heavy wire canopies over them—just in case Jerry bashed into a cable and let the tangle down on the W.A.A.F. girls who manned the defenses.

"Winches wun by wenchies," young Bryce said over and over, wondering why the silly lisped line always came to his mind and tongue whenever he saw a barrage balloon.

"What are you talking about?" Sprague snapped from his position up front. "Keep buttoned up, Bryce—and stay in position, even though we tangle with these guys. You stay in position!"

Bryce frowned and wished he could remember to snap his throat-mike off. Sprague always caught him when he was enjoying something ridiculous



like that. But Sprague was twenty-eight, Bryce reminded himself. You get old and crotchety at twenty-eight. You have two bars on your collar-tabs, and you have a lot of dopy responsibility. At twenty-two you're tickled with one second loogie bar, and you can kid yourself you're fighting the war your way, even though you have to stay in position and cover the Captain's tail.

The set crackled again, and Ken Harkness said: "How about down there, to the right, Skipper?"

Ken was sitting with his hatch-cover back, and he had one eye cocked over the starboard side. Bryce could see that from where he sat. Harkness was putting the old calipers on something below: "I mean, Skipper—cutting across for Tilbury. That's Tilbury on the other side, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't know what it is," Sprague spat back. "All I know is that there's ten or a dozen Dorniers down there. Let's go to work!"

David Bryce tried to figure out what it was Harkness was talking about. He steadied himself on his seat pack and took the peel-off signal from Sprague. He glanced over at Harkness again, and Ken signaled him down after the Skipper. That meant Sprague would get first shot at them, and Dave would be expected to tail him on through. Harkness could either hold the line or take a couple of deflection shots at the outer-position bombers.

Bryce still couldn't see them even after he had kicked her over and peeled off after Sprague. As the Rapier straightened out, he hung tight against his belt and realized for the first time what was expected of him. They were actually on their way down

to shoot someone. There were Dorniers down there—Jerry bombers with six guns, according to Harkness. They had been after the new docks at Gravesend. They could have been doing all this over Kiska, Guadalcanal or even Bizerte. It just happened they were flying Rapiers over a place called Gravesend. This was all part of the same war. . . . Gravesend, somewhere along the Thames.

"Where the hell are you going, Bryce?" someone bawled over the set. "Sprague is heading down there!"

BRYCE knew that must be Harkness. He was supposed to be somewhere behind. The pressure of the dive and the scream of slipstream seemed to be draining everything out of him. He tried to answer, but no sound came, and he struggled into the other corner of his seat to see what Sprague was doing.

The Skipper was not to be seen! "What happened, kid? Blackout on the peel-off?" Harkness asked. Bryce twisted around again, and was relieved to find that the sub-leader had moved down and was hurtling earthward beside him. Harkness made an exaggerated gesture with his thumb, curving it over to the right while he kicked over in a tight quarter-turn and led the way. Bryce corkscrewed after him, and together they slammed straight into the mess below.

The Dorniers were heading for the Estuary now, and Sprague was slamming wildly after them. The signal-strength was faltering in Bryce's set, but he could hear the Skipper shouting for them to tie up with him. From the dorsal turrets of the enemy bombers, streaks of converging tracer were snapping at Sprague's tail-surfaces. That made Bryce wince, because he was seeing for the first time the full optical effect of hostile gunfire. If one of those spitters snapped into Sprague's wing-root, there was a swell chance his tanks would go up. They could go up, even though they did have what the manufacturers called fireproof tanks. You hit 'em right, and you put in a long jagged gash that no self-sealing compound will blubber over. If Sprague got a flamer, he'd have to take to the silk.

The thought planted a heavy cold pebble between the layers of tissue that held in Bryce's belly. He didn't want to think about Steve; but with Sprague ripping in blindly like that, anything could happen.

Dave wound his way into position again, flying with jerky automatic movements. His mind was not on his gun-button or his formation position. He caught himself asking Steve what it felt like—what he said when he discovered the rip-cord wouldn't release his parachute over Farmingdale.

"Couldn't you have twisted around somehow and pulled the stuff out with your hands, Steve?" he asked for the twentieth time. "You can pull it out, can't you, Steve, if you can get the flaps open?"

"Stop that chatter!" Captain Sprague growled back at him over the short ether lane that separated them. "Stop that senseless chatter and stick to my tail, Bryce. Where the devil were you, anyway?"

"It's all right, Cappy!" assured Ken Harkness from the other flipper position.

Why did Harkness have to assume that Big Brother attitude? If Harkness knew so much, why couldn't he tell what had happened to Steve's 'chute? All he ever said about it was that it had been improperly packed, and insinuated that these test pilots often get careless about the little things because they have so many other matters to worry about. That was twenty-four being patronizing to twenty-two.

"Twenty-four is a boorish age," young Bryce decided. "You're neither one thing nor the other." Sprague was twenty-eight, and crowding his load figures with worry and responsibility. At twenty-four, you're taking yourself too seriously. Twenty-two is the age to be.

Sprague was charging into a Vee of three Dorniers now; his guns snapped serpent tongues of slitted flame and broke through the converging fire of the rear-turret gunners. There was a tallow-colored bulge of smoke and a forked blade of flame as a Dornier's port engine ripped out and hurled itself across the sky. A chunk of wing cranked up, flapped over and smacked the side of the bomber's fuselage with the crash of a depth-charge.

"That's one for you, Skipper!" Ken Harkness was cheering.

THE three Rapiers raged over the broken formation, and Sprague took them skyward with a triumphant zoom. Bryce wondered whether he should have tried a shot at one of the bombers in an upper layer. He mumbled something indistinct, fumbled with his reflector-sight knob and set the ring for a wide wing-span—just in case he got a chance.

Sprague took them around again, and Bryce saw three flopping figures tumble away from the burning bomber. He gripped the top of his stick hard, and heard his own guns rattling. He stared ahead with the realization he had frozen onto his button. His earphones screamed at him, but he couldn't make out the words. He still watched to see whether the three parachutes would open.

"Cut those guns!" Sprague finally broke through



H A R K N E S S

The involuntary burst had ruled several sparky parallel lines across the shaggy quilt of Surrey below. It wasn't much of a burst—but enough to enrage Sprague and jerk Bryce out of his blue funk. Beside, all three parachutes had opened. . . . Well, two had, at any rate. Young Bryce could not see the third. He had to take that one for granted.

"We'll keep after them," Sprague announced. "And don't waste your stuff that way, Bryce. You stay with me!"

The formation of bombers had sped on and was crossing the muddy Estuary. The Thanet ack-ack guns opened on them, and they splayed out wide and made the most of their stripped weight. The bombs had been jettisoned somewhere, and they enjoyed the speed of lean-flanked greyhounds now. To stay with them and carry out their routine attack maneuvers, would take all the Rapiers had. All the Dornier pilots had to do was to hold their depressed course and head for somewhere north of Calais. The Rapiers had to climb for position, evade the turret gunfire and ram in for sharp dive-attacks and clear again. All this took time, and seconds were precious when the occupied coast was only minutes away.

Bryce could see the scraggy beaches of Dunkirk and the shadowy warp and weft of barbed wire, the rusting hulks that had once formed part of a deliverance fleet—an epic he had read about so abstractly nearly three years before. He had been nineteen then, and a war three thousand miles away couldn't compete with the prospects of getting a tennis letter or the decision to be made as to whether he should go to Dartmouth or to Princeton.

Bryce moved in again and glanced across at Harkness. Sprague was jinking them all over the sky, darting in and out in an effort to drive another attack home. Ken was putting on the twenty-four business again and looking worried. They were well out over the Ditch now, and Sprague undoubtedly was bull-heading his way into trouble. Harkness shook his head when he caught Bryce's eye.

"Let's have another smack at them," Sprague called. "We'll each pick one this time and then beat it."

"You're too far—I mean, we're beyond our area now, aren't we, Skipper?" Harkness said as they moved around again.

"We'll take the three-ship element off to the left. We'll take one apiece," Sprague went on. "Let's go!"

DAVE BRYCE stared at his gun-button and made certain the safety collar was off. He fingered nervously under the cheek-flaps of his helmet and then slipped off his right glove. The old fear arose again as he stared under his left elbow at the heavy D-shaped rip-cord ring snuggling in its webbing pocket. He hoped he'd never have to pin his hopes on that thing. He dipped, and exuded the odor of sweat.

Sprague was climbing now, while the Nazi gunners snapped off short bursts calculated to keep them at their distance. David and Ken watched the leader thumb the sun before he curled into a position whereby they could enjoy some cover from the watery yellow ball.

"This is a mug's game," Bryce gulped. "We couldn't get back now—if anything happened."

He tried to talk himself into a fighting mood, but his words became dazed and jaded phrases. He tried to work up a gleam of hate for the enemy insignia that blazed from the wings and bodies of the bombers, but the realization that already three men had been forced to take to the silk left him with a hidden wound.

The reflector-sight gleamed a weak neon marker in the glass of his windshield and became a circular stamp of cowardice. He tried to remember what letter Hawthorne had used in his classic novel, to mark the breast of a woman. He wondered if all fighter pilots would come out of this war with a scarlet circle burned indelibly into their foreheads. He spat the fear of that into an indistinct corner, and banked sharply with Sprague.

"You can't miss, you guys!" taunted Sprague. "I take 'em—one, two, three."

"We're a hell of a long way over, Skipper," bleated Harkness.

But Sprague was charged with volts of promised victory. He zoomed, banked sharply and, poised high for

the attack. Harkness and Bryce came around after him, slithered through a tilted bank and splayed out into their positions. Together they roared down at the outer spearhead of bombers.

WHAT happened a second later lifted the heavy pebble from the pit of Bryce's stomach and punched it up into his throat. He opened his mouth wide, gasped—as ahead, Sprague's Rapier blew apart like a lay-out drawing of a quick-assembly job. The wings shot out, leaving hacked wounds of fractured metal. A toothed circlet of flame whipped around ahead of the windshield as the motor cowling ripped away. Smoke mushroomed back over the tail-assembly.

Bryce didn't yell. He simply hoiked his kite gently over the stalled wreckage and said: "They got the Skipper—a flamer!" He practically whispered it, as though it were on the secret list—like the Rapier. He nosed down gently, put his scarlet sight smack on the Dornier's dorsal turret and pressed the button.

He felt cool now. It was like having been bathed off with soft cotton and alcohol. Somehow he fitted the seat better, and the parachute pack was comfortable. The distance to the rudder-pedals had been adjusted, and all he had to was treadle lightly, left or right, and the Rapier responded with the certainty of a show mount in a Good Hands contest.

Bryce was moving in and out, serene and composed, as though he had been doing all this for months. From one three-ship element to another he darted, snapping off short bursts—amazed at the ease with which all this battle maneuver was accomplished. There were bombers in trouble everywhere. One was in flames, skating across the sky shaking its great head like a quirted mustang. The whole scene was tied together with long sparkling lengths of gift-package cord. That these might be incendiary shells from Nazi 20-mm. guns did not occur to Bryce. He still whispered: "They got the Skipper—a flamer!"

Then Ken Harkness' voice cried in anguish over the set: "Sprague's down! He hit damned hard too, Bryce. Smack into the sea. They won't get his crate!"

"This is a story, I guess," muttered Bryce, shagging back into the melee again. "I guess these are the things war correspondents write about. . . . Fighters and bombers. Maybe someone will write this one, some day."

He pressed off another burst at a Dornier. Pieces of metal flipped up and fluttered away in glinting sheets.

"I suppose I should write Dinky and tell her all about this," Bryce went on as he cleared a great chunk of wing-panel fluttering across the sky

Dinky was Hope Draper, a one-hundred-and-ten-pounder who carried plenty of authority with Bryce. Not exactly a Powers model, but she had stopped 84 A.T. Flight at Valdosta, where David had finished off before going overseas. Dinky was in some civic organization that helped the young married group find apartments, and drove her own station-wagon for the U.S.O. crowd there. Dinky's old gent was someone important in a Government group that was trying to straighten out the synthetic rubber tangle.

Dinky had caught up with Bryce shortly after Steve's affair. Steve's crack-up had almost washed David out, but Dinky hauled him off one night, on some excuse; and by the time they had pawed over a chicken blue-plate at Bébé's Barn, their future was pretty well accounted for. These kids don't waste any time on nonessentials.

"You're not going to let this spoil your life," Dinky had ordered. Bryce instinctively looked for at least an oak leaf of authority on her jacket. "After all, I have something in this kitty. Let's suppose Steve got it over Buna or Berlin: you wouldn't have quit, would you? He could have been leading an active service squadron, you know. You *could* assume he just checked out and left you to carry on."

"Some of us might be checked out as instructors," he suggested feebly.

THAT was where Dinky poured in the sauce. That's where she drew down her chunk of glory. She should have been awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor.

"That's out!" she stated simply. "We're not in the 'married-with dependents' class yet. That can wait until after the war. Someone has to instruct—but not you. You're a natural formation pilot, David. I get around, and I know what I hear."

"I guess you're right, Dinky," he agreed, suddenly remembering Steve.

"Listen, David," she added confidentially. "Instructors grow old too soon. Too much responsibility. If they get good, someone turns them into test-pilots. You're straight fighter material—for the duration. When it's all over, you step out and pick up where you left off. Not instructors, David. They stay in and don't even grow old gracefully. Not for us. Mr. Bryce."

He nodded dumbly and listened to the juke-box swing another record over. He turned and watched the tone-arm drop and capitulated with: "Okay, Dinko! Let's dance. When I get overseas, I'll drop you a line and tell you how good you are."

She reached up and kissed him: "You just write, sweetheart. You just have to write."



Harkness went past him, punching off short bursts at everything with black crosses on it. The Dornier formation was scattered all over the sky. A few headed into muffin-pats of cloud for safety.

Bryce snapped in his set and called the sub-leader: "You sure Jeff cleared and made the water, Ken? You're not going over any farther, are you?"

But Harkness was vitalized with his new authority, which was flailing him into chasing the bombers deep into the Pas de Calais area. There was nothing to do but tail him, according to instructions. Anything could happen now.

"Come on, Bryce!" Harkness was yelling. "We've got these guys cold now. We can pick them off by numbers. Let yourself go, kid!"



That was the general line Sprague had used. Guys of twenty-four, Bryce decided, are in the same category as pilots with about three hundred hours in their log books. They're in a bad spot. They've lost all their initial caution, and haven't picked up the full weight of experience. They're trying to justify themselves and prove they're ready for command and responsibility. Harkness was in a spot where he needed someone to level him off. This was just like handing the Nazis a brand-new Rapier.

Bryce palmed the throttle-knob up and flailed after his sub-leader. Ken was trying to break up another three-ship formation, and Bryce found himself riding wing-tip to wing-tip between the lead Dornier's two wing men—a swell spot for trouble.

Two dorsal turret gunners snapped their guns around and let him have it. The Rapier rang with the impact of the hate. Ken's Dornier target, up front, snapped over hard and coughed a black orchid of smoke. She rolled over on her back and stuck a wing-tip full into the port engine of an accompanying Dornier.

BRYCE never knew how he cleared the mess, but he came out smoking. The cockpit went into a blackout, and he gulped in a lungful. Finally he remembered to pull his oxygen mask up and rip the hatch-cover back. "This is it!" he muttered.

Harkness' voice came over the ear-phones, shouting something about making sure his safety-pin was clear. That meant he was to make certain

he could get rid of the harness the minute he hit the ground.

"Hit the silk, kid!" Harkness was saying. "I'll cover you on the way down—and best of luck!"

Bryce smoothed what he had left into an easy spiral and looked over the side. His starboard wing-tank was spuming a jagged pennon of flame and eating away the dural skin of the wing covering. He tugged at the safety catch of his belt and looked over the other side. That was France—or Belgium—down there. She might not burn clean out—it might be a good idea to stay with her long enough to make sure. These Nazi guys can do tricks, even with burned hulks.

"You can't stay there, Bryce!" Harkness was screaming again. "You're all right, aren't you? Get clear, kid!"

"They're not gonner get me this way," young Bryce muttered with a quick glance across his instrument board. He saw the two tank-gauges, and shoved his gloved fist through a licking of flame and switched over to the port tank. His young mind calculated fast, and his eyes separated minutes from the clock and assayed them against the vernier markings on the fuel-gauge. Forty-seven minutes against the starboard wing tankage didn't leave too much. Maybe he could sit this out.

"You doper!" Harkness was raging again. "Why don't you check out? You'll be back over the Ditch in a minute!"

"Sure! That's right. Maybe I can make the Ditch, the way Jeff did. They won't be able to get her there. Maybe, with the wheels partly down, I can belly-flop her in and not get it too bad. They'll come out and snatch me, but they won't get the kite!"

THAT was one reasoning Bryce worked up; but over the other wire he was trembling with the fear of having to take to the silk. Steve took to the silk once—and she didn't balloon for him. It can happen again. There's a law of averages somewhere, and it can happen twice.

Harkness wouldn't be able to understand that. He was twenty-four and irrational. You have to be twenty-two to figure fast with time against tankage. Harkness could figure—but not up here without a slide-rule. Two years can make a difference.

Young Bryce glanced over again, drew a leg back from the flame and realized he was staring at two naked compression ribs. He could see the breeches of three guns too. The flame was gobbling the wing surface as if it

were tin-foil. Two former-ribs had been torched into something resembling a small hank of wash-line. If the main spar was getting any of that heat—

Something hot was tightening about his right leg. He kicked at the hole through which the flame was spearing into the cockpit. He then wondered whether he could block it off with the sole of his boot.

"Fifty minutes is top time under normal operating conditions," he argued with what dials he could see on the instrument board. "Why couldn't Harkness think of that?"

But Harkness' reasoning had been impaired by the sight of Bryce's flamer. To gamble tankage against time never entered his head: "Why don't you clear, kid? Why don't you—"

There was a choked convulsion up front as the Rapier's engine took over the supply from the port tank. Bryce listened and then huddled over as far as he could get. The flame was boring gimlet holes through the sole of his right foot now. He leaned out farther and saw the Ditch below, and wondered how long he'd been clear of the enemy coast.

"Nearly fifty minutes, and she's still burning raw stuff," he grumbled. "Shows you how guys like Harkness can get their figures mixed. Fifty minutes, they say—but maybe they allow a few more as a margin of safety."

He quaked at that. The margin of safety was going to make him take to the silk yet. He looked about and saw Harkness riding tight on his wing-tip. The sub-leader was doing mysterious things with his hands—pointing at something and then holding his palms out. Bryce's set was out, and he could no longer hear what he was saying.

"I know! I know! I'll wash her out as soon as I'm certain we're in the clear," he argued. "You don't have to tell me."

He peered about for the button that would lower his landing-gear. He was puzzled to find the cockpit clear of smoke now. He tried to drag his right foot over to the rudder pedal, but the rubber sole was stuck fast to a blackened metal former. He tugged again and tore it clear—and no flame snapped through.

"Hey, wait a minute," he deliberated and looked at the clock again. "Fifty-one minutes—"

He moved over and glanced down at the starboard wing root, and suddenly Harkness' voice came through again: "Maybe if you took it easy, she'd hold out! That main spar has a factor of safety of about ten. Maybe we can get you in, kid."

"Here he comes again," Bryce growled. "A few minutes ago he was telling me to dive out the window!"

"Now, don't lose your head, kid!" the sub-leader was bleating. "We'll get you back if you take it easy."

"Don't you worry about me, Harkness. I'm sticking with this hulk all the way home. I'm not dropping her in the Ditch, and I'm not taking to the silk. I'm taking her in—all the way. She's mine!"

HARKNESS put on his act all the way home, and went in first to give his version of the patrol. He had the meat-wagon out near the runway, and posed with a studied air of authority. As Bryce went over once to see if any special signal had been put out, they could see a large chunk of daylight through his starboard wing.

"That's nothing," Harkness explained. "She's got a main spar with a factor of safety of about ten. I told him he'd be okay. I was afraid he'd lose his head and jump out the window. You have to think for some of these kids, you know."

The Rapier came in fast for want of flap-area, and Bryce just saved her from ground-looping by judicious use of his brakes. He brought her around and wobbled up to the dispersal area. Before they could get to him, he shoved one blackened leg out stiffly. A ground crew corporal took one look and walked away.

Harkness rushed up and grabbed him as he tottered on the wing: "Nice going, kid. I'm glad you didn't chuck it and take to the silk. You know, they give guys D.F.C.'s for efforts like this."

Young Bryce, being only twenty-two, couldn't think of anything heroic in response. The war correspondents have to think up those lines. He just said: "What's that? The Distinguished Frying Cross?"



"You're a natural formation pilot, David," Dinky had said.

A Wartime Interlude

by
Francis
Cockrell



Shore Leave

CHRISTOPHER MARSH heard a song one night at sea; the salt air was warm, and a soft breeze swept the deck and blew the words away. The sea was so smooth that even a destroyer rode gently, soothingly. There had been no action for nearly three days.

The song was about a girl the sailor had met in Venezuela.

*... With a basket on her head.
If she had met others, she did not say,
But I knew she'd do to pass away,
To pass away the time in Venezuela. . . .*

Chris was looking up at a moonless sky against which the stars were small and bright. The tune had a wistful, haunting quality. Luke Shore was singing it to his guitar, and he sang

it just exactly right—lingeringly, whisperingly. . . . The sailor had bought her a silken sash of blue.

*... . Because I knew that she would do,
With all the things I knew she knew,
To pass away the time in Venezuela. . . .*

Beneath Luke's broken nose his mouth spread a little in a dreamy smile, and his warm dark eyes caught

some starlight and glowed softly; he sang of parting when the wind was out to sea:

... And she was taking leave of me,
I said, "Cheer up, there'll always be
Sailors with leave ashore in Venezuela,
Sailors to pa-a-ss the time in Venezue-
ela."

Chris and the four or five other sailors listening were silent for a moment, and then Red Anderson said suddenly: "Jeeps, aint we never gonna make a port again?"

The others laughed, and Chris said: "Take it easy, Red; that's just a song, not a promise."

"Well, hell, we can't stay to sea forever," Red said. "You reckon we'll make a port down here, Luke?"

Luke said: "Maybe. But it prob'ly won't be much."

That song created some visions for Chris anyhow: red lips in a smile first, and flashing eyes, and skirts which moved with a quick, graceful swish; wine and music and mysterious foreign food; palm trees in long rows down peaceful streets, and moonlight on the sea, and a smooth wide beach; and the red lips smiling and the dark eyes laughing.

Of course he knew that was pipe-dream stuff. A day or so with a lovely Latin lass among romantic scenery, and then away you sail again. Very fine. But not the sort of thing that ever happened, naturally.

SO he was surprised when they came to port and these fancies began to turn real right before his eyes. Pipe-dreams were one thing; life was another: something was certain to be wrong.

He and Luke and Red had caught a long share of duty in the last port, and they went ashore this time at noon with slightly more than twenty-four hours' liberty. Red Anderson was a big freckled kid from an Oklahoma farm, and Luke Shore had been a Texas cowboy. Christopher Marsh had been studying law in an Alabama town where Marshes had been lawyers for a long, long time; but he hadn't had a chance to practice yet. He was twenty-two. He was taller than the other two, with a lean, tanned face and yellow hair, and a blithe way of doing things.

Viewed from the sea, the roofs of the buildings in the flat part of the city pushed up through tall green trees, and green hills rose steep behind, with colored stucco houses decorating them. Ashore there were the palms in the long rows down long avenues, and green, green grass, and shade and parks with little lakes and boats; and the business section was not too big or busy, though filled with smiling people, bright sounds and cheer-

*Illustrated by
Charles Chickering*



ful colors. It was all the song had made Chris think of, which was pleasant, and in itself not unreasonable.

Luke and Red found girls without delay. Turning a corner from the main street, they confronted two approaching, and Luke stopped and spread his arms.

"Why, hello there, you cute little old señoritas, you!" he said delightedly. "Where you bound for, anyhow?"

And the señoritas stopped and smiled, and giggled in a friendly way at Luke's wide gestures, and in a moment the four had linked arms happily and were ready to move on.

"Come on, Chris, we'll find you one in a minute," Red said. "Won't we, sweeties?"

The girls smiled. They were not exactly what Chris' fancy painted when he listened to that song, of course, but in their way they were pretty cute just the same.

But Chris said not to bother about him. "You-all go on," he said. After

all, there wasn't any rush. "I'll probably see you later," he said. "I'll find you."

So they went on, and he took a ride on a funny little street-car whose top stuck out way beyond its sides, and which stopped anywhere at all to pick up people or put them down. When it skirted a park, he got off and walked through the park.

THERE was a still, winding lagoon that led toward the sea, and a hillside rose beyond it to the right, with houses on it, visible at times through the greenery. At the end of the park, within a small café, there lurked a dreamy-eyed old man with white hair and fierce black eyebrows.

Chris got a bottle of beer from him, which was not cold, but was good, and he got another presently and took it outside to a little sort of garden where

The girl was a dream. "Do you speak English?" Chris asked. "No, I suppose not."



you could sit and look out across the beach, across the bay. There was a railing along the seaward side.

The girl came there. He had had a swallow of beer and watched a small sailboat, leaning gracefully, creep out of sight around the bay's point to the left, when she came.

Walking swiftly, she skirted the bushes at the entrance to the garden, and there was a sailor after her. He was close behind, trying to catch up, speaking insistently. She strode to the railing and wouldn't turn her head. Chris had caught the dark look on her face, and got up and went over. He knew the sailor well enough to know he didn't like him much.

The sailor turned when Chris put a hand upon his arm.

"Everything points," Chris said, "to your being less than *persona grata* here. In fact, superfluous."

The other jerked his arm away. "Listen, Marsh, you—"

Chris put a hand on his shoulder. "Shall we brawl?" he asked benignly. "What difference would it make to a

face so garbled to begin with, to get mixed up a little more?"

Chris was about three inches the taller of the two, and had a somewhat eager look. The sailor said sullenly: "I won't forget this, pal."

"Well, I should think not," Chris said. "It must be most humiliating. Trot along now."

He watched the sailor leave, noticing the girl from the corner of his eye. She remained with her back to him, looking out to sea uncompromisingly. She wasn't tall, but her figure was proportioned beautifully, and there was considerable lustrous black hair partly contained in a handkerchief of bright silk print. Her skirt was full and hung gracefully; it would swish.

Chris moved a little nearer, to the rail by her side, but he did it casually and unhurriedly.

"Do you speak English?"

She turned her head and gave him a swift glance; and those eyes were flashing all right, and the lips were red, though not exactly smiling at the moment. But that didn't matter, naturally, for she would do for anybody's dream.

"I suppose not," he murmured. "Well, I don't intend to take up where he left off, you understand," he started with a cheerful lie. "Not exactly." For it was too good to be true, of course; something would go wrong;

but he'd be a giddy idiot if he didn't have a try. He moved slightly away and leaned back against the rail, and smiled in a way he hoped would be reassuring if she looked toward him again, but she didn't.

"I hate for you to get the wrong idea of our Navy," he went on at random. "We do rather better as a rule than our erstwhile apeline chum. . . . Maybe I mean our erstwhile chum, apeline. Well. . . . But you shouldn't be too hard, even on him. Maybe—" He turned and leaned by her side, trying to give a friendly, platonic impression. "I mean, he's been ten weeks at sea, you know, with no chance to talk to a girl at all, to say nothing of a girl like you."

He was looking at her then, and again for a moment she let her eyes meet his; then she looked out to sea once more.

"Well," he said softly, after a small time of this, "that is to say, no chance in a lifetime probably, to talk to a girl like you. I'm afraid I understand. He couldn't resist trying to acquaint himself with you, once he had caught a glimpse of you, a thing out of his dreams—if the lug has dreams! Out of mine, anyhow."

HE paused, his eyes fixed on her profile; they moved to her throat, to her bare arms; he knew her skin would feel silken smooth and warm.

"He couldn't resist it," he said, "any more than I can." And he went on talking because he didn't know what else to do.

"He didn't have a chance, once he had seen you—walking in the graceful way you have, or standing apart with that look you have, so beautiful, so utterly, so vividly alive." One thing, flowery or not, he wasn't telling lies. "Maybe you're not absolutely everything that can be done in setting up a female to please an eye like mine. Possibly. But if you're not, I don't know where the flaw lies."

From the corner of her eye she gave him an obscure, quick look then. Only that. He smiled politely and went on:

"You are undoubtedly the most tempting, most exciting, most luscious, most outrageously seductive creature I have ever seen," he said, gesturing lightly with one hand, as if commenting on the weather or the view. "And this is a hell of a lot of fun too, I might add, being able to go into the subject with you frankly, this way, without restraint. It gives me a sort of gay, unfettered feeling, you might say, not having to weigh things."

She turned a bit more away from him, but he moved too, so he could see her profile again.

"Yes, indeed," he went on chattily, "yes, indeed, I'd be quite tongue-tied,

doubtless, if you could understand my words, so maybe in a way it's a good thing that you don't speak English. Though I'll have to admit no one else has ever brought about in me quite the sensations that you produce. Of course," he suggested, leaning to catch a look at her, "the ten weeks at sea may have some bearing on this. Do you suppose? In any case, do let me tell you again that for sheer, exciting—"

He stopped. She had turned and was facing him, and seemed about to speak. She looked down suddenly instead.

"You are," he began again, "undoubtedly—"

Silence seized him.

After a long moment her eyes flicked upward to his face for a quick second and then down again.

Color stole up his neck, into his face; he began to feel weak and lost.

She raised her eyes once more, and this time they simply stood there staring at each other with a funny kind of distress. Neither of them knew what to do.

Once her mouth twitched slightly at one corner, and at the same instant Chris burst forth with a crazy, short, sudden laugh.

But they were immediately silent and sober again.

Then, tentatively, embarrassedly, watching each other, they began to grin.

And then they began to laugh together, and once they had started, nothing could stop them; they just kept on and on until their eyes were full of tears and their sides hurt and they were limp and weak.

THAT did it, of course. There was nothing to it then. . . .

In a long, narrow little boat, sitting low in the water, they rode all through that winding lagoon, beneath its overhanging trees. An Indian stood in the stern and poled them deftly, and there were flowers in the water, and flowers thick on the banks too, and it was beautiful.

They didn't talk much, because there didn't seem any need for talk.

Chris looked at her frequently as if he thought any minute she might turn to smoke and vanish—which he did, of course. Or he would wake up, or something.

But nothing happened except it was wonderful, and they went to ride in a taxi out along a road by the sea.

He had told her his name, and hers was Anita. "Anita is enough," she said, but she made that sound merely reasonable, not coy. She said she had learned English in school. "I speak with much accent, maybe, no?"

"Your English is swell," Chris said. "Just a little late, is all."

She laughed. It was an event when she did; the dark eyes laughed too, as advertised, and it made him mildly dizzy every time. They laughed rather often, always together, and a good many times at things a lot of people wouldn't laugh at.

Chris told her, when she asked him, what it could be like in the north Atlantic in wintertime, and what it was like to sink a submarine and where his town in Alabama was, and things like that. Most of the times he asked her anything about herself, she would only look at him thoughtfully and not reply; but she didn't do it rudely,



somehow; and besides, it didn't matter, because when he put his arm about her shoulders, she let him keep it there, and that was enough to know right then.

He wanted to buy her something when they were back in town; and finally, in a shop on the main street, she let him help choose another square of silk to go about her hair. There was no discussion of the choice; in one a certain blue was dominant, and they looked once at it and once at each other, and then she began to tie it on. Into Chris' ear, sung softly, came:

*A silken sash of blue,
Because I knew that she would do—*

Chris turned, and Luke was standing there grinning at him.

"I guess I sure been underestimating you, Marsh. How you makin' out?"

"Let me present Mr. Luke Shore, from Texas," Chris said as Anita turned around. "That's west of Alabama a piece, along the Gulf of Mexico."

She looked at them with a trace of laughter in her eyes and said, "How do you do, Mr. Shore?" gazing at his battered, attractive face with frank, friendly curiosity.

He reached out and lifted her hand and shook it and said, "I'm fine. I'm pleased to meet you," and looked at Chris again and went on grinning; not slyly, just in hearty, sincere congratulation.

"We're down the street," he said. "I seen you-all come in. Well, I guess I better get on back." He looked

from one to the other and grinned again. "Well, I wish you both a lot of luck," he said. "A lot of luck."

Anita watched him go. "I like his soul," she said. "It is full of happy things."

"That's right," Chris said. "It is."

WHEN they came onto the street again the sun was low. They strolled. Chris still wasn't quite able to believe this was happening, when he stopped to think about it; so he didn't stop to think. He just strolled along looking ahead to the rest of the evening in a vague, happy way, making plans; that is, day-dreaming plans. Dinner, everything they did, would be something special. Music and mysterious food and wine and moonlight on the beach. Everything. There was lots of money, too; he carried two months' pay.

They were near a corner, and she stopped. Then she said, "I must go now," somewhat regretfully.

Chris looked at her blankly. He couldn't have heard that!

"What?" he said.

"I must go," she said again, and the alarm and dismay flooding his face were so instant and complete that her own eyes, which had been troubled, grew more so. "Oh, I am sorry! I think maybe I should tell you. I—"

He had heard it. "But you can't!" he began almost violently. "You can't! Don't you understand—" But he stopped. He subsided because he could see it wasn't any use. He said gloomily: "Can't you—even come back? Or something. Later on?"

She shook her head. "I am sorry. I should have said. But— I must go now."

His face grew expressionless and his voice grim. "Okay," he said. A taxi stood near by; he opened the door. "Okay, you got to go, then. Get in."

She got in and turned, leaning so that her head was in the open window of the door. She was looking at his eyes.

"I am sorry. . . . I am sorry—"

"Why be sorry?" Chris asked. "Forget it. Here!" And he held out a bill for her to pay the cab with.

"Oh, no, that is not—"

"Go on and take it!" He tossed it into her lap. "Don't be coy. I can't drink it up alone, and dough's no good at sea. Good-by."

She dropped her eyes. "It is not possible for me to come back," she said after a moment. "I am sure of that." She spoke slowly, and there was loneliness in her tone. "But— but if I could,—she was almost whispering,—"where should I come?"

His hands came up and rested on the edge of the door, gripping it tight.

"Anywhere!" he said. "I'll be there. Anywhere you say."

She raised her head. "At the little café in the park, then," she said softly. "But I cannot come—I think. And not before—nine o'clock, not possibly. If I—cannot—I am sorry. You will believe?"

"You come," he said. "I'll wait. I'll be there. You come."

He watched the taxi drive away. Well, there it was. She wouldn't come, of course. He would never see the girl again.

He was at the park at eight-thirty, anyhow. And despite the fact that he continued to tell himself she wouldn't come, he couldn't help being cheerful and rather excited at first; he couldn't keep from imagining her coming, how she would look, and their meeting, and then setting forth with the night before them.

But that didn't last; the excitement died away. For she didn't come. He had been waiting outside; at ten he went back into the café. He'd drink a beer and smoke a cigarette, then leave.

He did. He finished the beer and stepped on his cigarette outside and walked away. He looked over his shoulder, though, at intervals, until the path curved and hid the café from his sight.

Well, he had known to start with it wouldn't last, that something would go wrong; life was made up of much more ordinary stuff. It was a sort of let-down, even so. He didn't feel so gay.

It wasn't long before he had made his way back into town and down on to the brightly lighted sailors' street along the waterfront, where there was lots of noise and talk and music. He could at least get cockeyed.

BUT he didn't, though he applied himself. He visited several *cantinas* where there were small orchestras, and sailors and their girls, and unattached sailors and unattached girls, who now and then became attached. He came on Luke Shore and Red Anderson and their cute little old señoritas in one of them.

They all hailed him happily, and he made his way through the crowd to their table, and they had a drink brought for him. They were feeling wonderful and going strong.

He drank his drink and started on another, but he never finished it. He just got up and said maybe he would see them later, and went out to the street again.

He wasn't getting anywhere. He might as well just go on to a hotel and get a night's sleep in a real bed and let it go at that. He'd take a walk through the park and then turn in. Not to look for her, of course; she wouldn't be there; just a quiet walk by himself before he went to bed.

It took him near the little café anyhow; and when the path curved to reveal it, his eyes were on it right away. Its lights still burned, but as he watched, some of them went out.

The door opened and someone came out—a girl. She walked off toward the hills, at right angles to his approach. He was in no mood to believe in fairy tales right then, but he walked faster anyhow.

He couldn't see her clearly. But he began to run. He slowed when he came near; he would look silly to a stranger, all breathless and hurrying.

And he was afraid to call, but before he had caught up with her, the girl raised her head, at the sound of his footsteps possibly, and then looked back across her shoulder.

She stopped and turned around.

Without a word they ran, crossing the dozen yards which separated them in a breath, coming to a halt tightly within each other's arms.

For a moment neither spoke, and then she whispered, "I thought you would not come, I thought you would not wait!" And he was saying: "Sure, I know, I know. I didn't wait. But I came back; I had to come back once more to see."

He released her a little, holding his hands upon her arms. Some light from the café came past his shoulder to her face, and her eyes shone in it, and she was smiling a small shy smile; it was plain she was glad to be with him again.

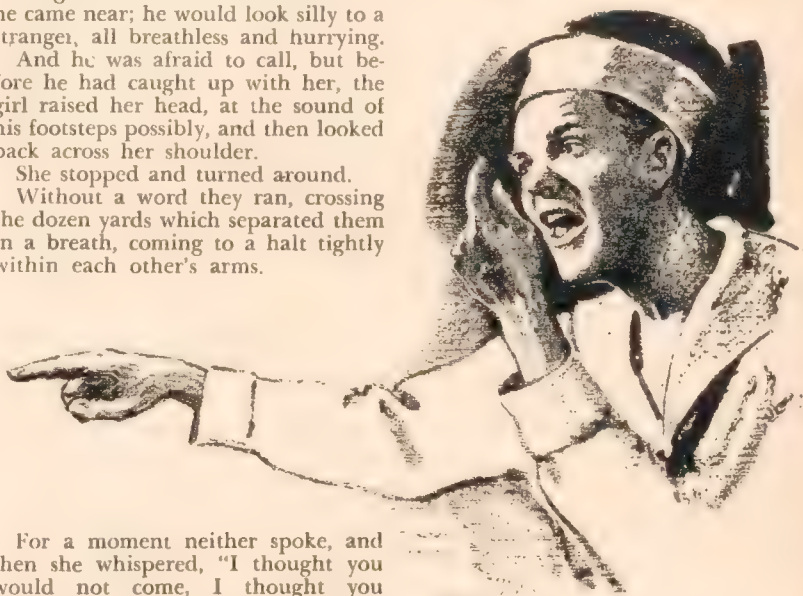
"Everything is all right now," Chris said. "Everything is swell." He took her hands and held one in each of his and squeezed it briefly and then tucked her arm through his. "Come on," he said. "We'll have some champagne first. And after that—anything. Anything you say."

The old man wanted to finish closing, but Chris laid enough money down to make him change his mind; to make him serve them a bottle of champagne, anyhow, and leave enough light for them to see each other by. Actually he did go on and close so no one else could enter, but he had no trouble with them over that.

The things they did that night were simple things to seem so remarkably romantic. They merely rode in a taxi, first, as they had before, out beside the sea, and then came back and rode once about the town.

The only places open then were the sailors' places on the waterfront and they went to none of those, but they rode down past them, and it was fun to hear the sounds of gayety and be near other people having fun, and be still alone, apart from them.

And when they let the taxi go, they rode through that lagoon again. There was no Indian now to pole them, but the boats were there, and they poled themselves.



Then it was time for a late, last quarter of a moon to rise, and they went down onto the beach to watch it come. They pushed sand into a sloping mound just right to lean back on. The sand was still warm from the day, and the sea was sleepy and only sighed as it gently smoothed the beach.

Chris was no longer looking for a flaw in things, because how could there possibly be one now? How could anything be wrong? He didn't care whether this was pipe-dream stuff or not. It was happening, and happening to him.

They watched the moon come up.

IN approximately the same place, in due time, the sun came up and found them there.

Chris opened his eyes to its brightness, looking up at the sky, not realizing immediately just where he was. Then he knew, from the heaviness in his right shoulder, the deadness of the arm, and he turned his head gently and saw Anita's face.

Her lashes were extremely long; her mouth was lovely as she slept.

Her own eyes came slowly open then, looking into his. They were

sleepy eyes, but they were clear, and quite conscious of where they were and what they saw, and contented with it. For a moment her lips parted in a tiny smile; then her eyes closed again.

Chris looked up at the sky once more, and grinned and drew a deep, swell breath. Imagine!

They had breakfast at the little café in the park. Before that they had been swimming; Anita knew a place down the beach where they got suits. It was fine swimming then: cool, and they had the beach almost to themselves.

The old man hovered near while they ate, and gave them approving, conspiratorial looks from beneath his fierce eyebrows.

There was no mention today of their not staying together until it was time for Chris to go. He had to be aboard by three.

AFTER breakfast they strolled slowly around. There was a modest zoo in another park. They walked through it and looked at the animals without seeing them at all clearly, and without that mattering.

And they had lunch in a restaurant away up on the hillside, at a table by the window where they could look down upon the spread-out city and the blue-green bay, and Chris' ship, lying there quite small.

There wasn't anything wrong with that, was there? With any of it, with anything? There shouldn't be.

When they were sitting over coffee, having more, Chris said a bit uncertainly: "Maybe—maybe we might write to each other sometime. Do you think? I mean—we might get back here some day. Or something."

She was looking down toward the bay, and he watched her face with a faint frown on his own. He thought she wasn't going to answer him.

But she did, finally, still not looking at him. She gave her head a tiny shake.

"I do not think it would be—a good thing. I think now, when we are saying good-by truly, we should say good-by in our minds also."

Well, how could he blame her for not wanting to sit around and think about a guy who wasn't coming back? What was the matter with him?

One thing the matter was that he kept hearing the song—in a back part of his mind; it followed him around, and that had been fine yesterday, but somehow today he didn't like it much.

Sailors with leave ashore. . . . He didn't like those sailors either; any of them there had been, or might be later on.

And it annoyed him to feel that way, because it seemed stupid, and young and innocent, and because there

was nothing he could do about it, anyhow.

And there was something else there was nothing he could do about; he couldn't do anything about three o'clock; he couldn't keep it from coming right along, from getting there.

She didn't go with him to the docks. They took a taxi back to the little park where they had met. And as they rode, a worried, uncertain feeling grew in Chris.

They got out of the cab to say good-by, and as they stood there looking at each other and she put her hands in his, the uncertainty changed into a sort of panic.

"Good luck," she said, and smiled, and he seemed to lose his breath somehow and the panic grew.

There was something wrong; there was something very wrong.

"Good-by," she said, and kissed him, lingeringly, and only once.

And what went on inside of him was pretty dreadful then.

It shouldn't be this way! Maybe it should be a trifle sad, wistful, possibly; but oh, it shouldn't be like this, it shouldn't be like this at all!

And there was nothing he could do. He had to go; the clock said that. There was nothing he could say, except, "Good-by," and he said that in a queer, toneless voice, and then numbly climbed into the taxi and motioned to the driver to go on.

Slowly the taxi moved away. He was turned around, kneeling in the seat, staring back at her across the lowered top. He kept on looking at her and she didn't move, but his picture of her blurred.

And then the taxi made a curve and she was gone. Mechanically he turned around and slid down in the seat.

Utter loneliness settled over him.

IN the late afternoon they put to sea.

Chris was not on duty once they were under way, and he moved to the stern and stood by the rail in a place alone, staring back at the roofs sticking up through the trees and at the gay colors of the houses on the green hillside above.

It fell away quite rapidly; everything grew small. Presently, with a sort of frightening suddenness, it was gone. And she was gone.

And there was nothing he could do.

That was the worst part, maybe: the fact that there was nothing he could do. That's what gave him the feeling of bleak and awful hopelessness.

It didn't matter that he didn't know her name; even if he should come back to look for her some day, and chance should let him find her, then what?

She had been gay and beautiful and marvelous, but that had been when



they were alone here for one romantic day. That hadn't been in Alabama for a lifetime, with his family and his friends, in the big old white brick house the Marshes had built more than a hundred years ago, which Marshes had always lived in.

He was romantic maybe, but not an idiot. It was too bad, and no mistake, but there was nothing for him to do but accept the fact and forget it all as quickly as he could.

Forget it? Well, he could bury it a little bit; he could obscure it maybe, with enough other things.

There were footsteps near, and then Luke Shore was by his side, looking back too, humming lazily.

. . . . If she had met others, she did not say,

But I knew she'd do to—

And Christopher Marsh spun on him and yelled in a flame of rage:

"Stop it, damn you! Can't you stop that? Damn it, and damn you, Luke! That's what ruined everything."

And then he was silent as abruptly as he had shouted, for what had the song to do with it? What would have been different if there had been no song?

Luke gazed at him queerly for a moment and then asked mildly: "Say, what's the matter with you? Are you nuts?"

And Chris slumped against the rail again, staring out to sea.

"Yes," he said at last despairingly. "I guess I'm nuts."



They rode through the winding lagoons. . . . They didn't talk much; there didn't seem any need for talk.

There was another port one day, in about six weeks that is, and more than a thousand miles away.

It wasn't like the other one at all. It was very hot, and the country was bare, sandy stuff, and the town was small and five miles from the base, and there was nothing to do in it but drink, once you were there. And they'd be a week this time, at least. They'd been lucky, with a chance to ram a submarine, and it had knocked a few plates loose.

ON the fourth morning they were there, Christopher Marsh walked from his ship along past other ships in the hot bright sunlight. He wasn't hurrying, because there would be some mistake, of course. He was a thousand miles from any place he had ever been before, and no one he knew knew he was here. So he couldn't have a visitor.

He turned and walked down beside the long warehouse, in the shade, toward the high wire fence and gates a hundred yards away. When his eyes grew used to the shade, he saw that a girl stood on the other side.

She had on a pale blue suit and a big straw hat to shield her from the sun. He couldn't identify her from where he was, and he walked a little faster and he wore a little frown. She held her hands together at her waist, and she watched him all the way.

And he walked a little faster still, with a breathless, dizzy feeling coming over him, and by the time he reached the gate he was nearly running, and he could hardly wait for the Marine there to look at his liberty card and let him through.

And Anita held out her hands to him, but he didn't take them and swept her into his arms instead.

He couldn't speak at all at first, and then he could only murmur: "Oh, it's you! It's you! Thank God you came." And the queerest thing was going on inside of him, a sort of delightful evaporation taking place. No solution to a problem had appeared; he simply had no problems any more.

He said again, "Thank God you came," and held her away a few inches so he could look at her. "Because," he said, and it seemed fantastic now, but he knew that it was true, "because do you know, if you hadn't come, I might never have got the sense together to come back and look for you."

"I would not have been there," she said. "I was only visiting my uncle."

"We're going to be married," Chris said. "As soon as possible. You understand that, don't you?"

She let her head fall a little to one side, and smiled at him. "I have made the long journey to discover this," she said.

CHRIS put his hands on her arms; not letting her go, but giving her a chance to breathe. His eyes drank in her face.

In a moment he said simply: "I hope you will like it in Alabama. I hope you will like my family and the way we live, but you must remember it is not too important if you don't. We'll find another way of living we both like, that is all." He paused a moment, drew a breath. "Because you see," he went on with no uncertainty, "it doesn't matter who we are or where we've lived or how. It's what we are now, inside, to ourselves and to each other. That's what counts. Other stuff, it's minor; it can be adjusted if it needs to be. It's simple," he said, "really. Once you understand."

"Yes," she said, "I know—when I see your ship go out of sight." Then her eyes grew sober. "But my mother and my father, it is different. I tell

when I visit my uncle, how I go down to the park sometimes with no one to accompany, and how you come, and then I find I love you some, and so I steal back again, that night. And when I find I love you so—this way—and say I will marry you—” She gave her head a little shake. “I do not know. My mother cries, and my father growls with fury, and I think he will not see me again. . . . That is unhappy.”

Chris looked at her. “What?” he said blankly.

“A sailor I do not know,” she said. “They fear you to be—not somebody. With no family perhaps, no wealth. Only my uncle understands this does not matter. I tell him, and he listens to me and arrange passage by the air, and brings me here. He understands it—is different in these days.”

“Oh,” Chris managed weakly. “Oh. . . . I see.”

It had been the song, of course; once he had started thinking in its terms, he couldn't stop, even with his feelings trying to make him see that he was wrong. . . . Well, it was done now, but it gave him a cold chill of fright to realize what he might have let a vague fancy do to them.

“I think it'll be all right,” he said then. “About your family, I mean. You see, anyone is liable to enlist in the Navy from our town in Alabama. We get steamed up kind of easy there.”

“Of course!” she said without concern, and took his arm and started toward the street where the taxi she had come out from town in stood.

SO there would be no problems, after all. That seemed awfully unimportant now. The thing that was important—

He stopped. “Hey! Hell's bells, we've got to wait! And I don't want to wait until this war is done to get married! Damn it, why do they—”

“We do not wait,” she said. “Our wedding is at five o'clock; my uncle—”

“No,” Chris said miserably, “you don't understand. We can't. The skipper—my captain—is the only one—”

“It is arrange,” she said. “My uncle has talk with your captain. My uncle is very confidential with the American Minister, you see, and that is how the American Minister let him know your ship is here, when knowing can do no harm. After he explain this—love. And the American Minister gives him the letter to introduce him with your captain, and it is all arrange. My uncle is waiting for us at the hotel.”

“But,” Chris said feebly, “but I don't see—I mean—” He stopped and let it penetrate. “I mean,” he said with a grin, “well, what a fine type for an uncle! Don't you think so?”

The Crescent Is

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

S ANUTE HALL was well off the highway, but along the avenue of live-oaks that led to the house, it had a view of the road a mile distant. So, from afar, the horse and its burden were seen limping up the avenue. A ragged black man rode the horse, holding in his arms a white man who was obviously hurt and unconscious. From the barrel of the horse blood dripped into the dust, slowly but steadily forming a thin red trail.

“Blue coat! Blue-an'-buff coat! Tell Missy Ca'line hurt man, blue coat—”

A buzz of voices like summer bees traveled up the long avenue, through the fields, across the gardens; they came to the high brick house and echoed under the gallery and ran sing-

song through the buildings. It was a May day of 1780, and Charles Town was but thirty miles away. Slaves ran; feet trampled the gallery; eager black folk assembled, staring.

“Foreign horse, foreign man!” Somehow the buzzing words were felt, rather than heard. “Tell Missy we wear a blue coat, and dere's blood in de road!”

Missy Ca'line came out of the front door, went down the steps, and stood in the drive. She wore a blue dust-gown and her hair was wrapped up; she was in the middle of the spring cleaning and looked a fright, if such a thing were possible for Caroline Jennys.

The burdened horse approached her and halted—a shambling, lathered, weary, hurt horse, standing with head down in exhaustion.

The Negro sat his saddle and looked at her calmly. She could tell at a glance that he was not a Corramantee like her own slaves—the best African type, as a rule considered a friend rather than a slave. No; by his intelligent eyes, his sensitive features, his hint of Arab blood, she knew he must be a Senegal man. He was waiting for her to speak.



*Illustrated by
John Richard
Flanagan*

“Well?” She was a trifle flustered by the proud, steady gaze, and by the blood that dripped into a little pool under the horse's belly. “Who is this?”

“Cap'n Blake, ma'am. The British have done took Charles Town, and we come away; but Cap'n's hoss was shot, and he hurted himself. And I 'spect they're close after us.”

for *Hope*

Flags of Our Fathers—XI

"We'll take care of him. Get down!"

"I cain't, ma'am. I done got shot too."

Missy Ca'line called swiftly. Her blacks crowded around. The limp figure of Blake was gently lowered; then the Senegal man sighed, and swayed in the saddle, and toppled over. It was his blood that had run down the stirrup and girth, dripping to the dust as he rode. All of it! He had bled to death. He smiled and mumbled something about Cap'n Blake's plantation up north on the Wacamaw River, which the British had burned; and then he died quietly, happily, assured that his master was safe.

Voices buzzed anew. In the midst, a black boy from the next plantation down the Cooper River came bolting up the road like a frightened rabbit, and yammered out a panting message in Gullah talk. British troops were all over the world. Charles Town was fallen. The British were coming! Not close by, but coming fast—red coats, on horses!

JOHN BLAKE wakened to wonder; the afternoon was going. He lay on a four-poster bed of carved rose wood in a softly beautiful room; it was at the back of the house, and its windows gave a glorious view across the marvelous vista there; but he had no thought for view or vista. He had been bathed and bedded; and a tall black man, scrawny as a live-oak branch, patriarchal with white wool above glinting spectacles, was tending his hurts—chiefly the gash down his right thigh. A stone had cut him there when his horse went down.

"Where am I?" he demanded. "My clothes—the flag—the dispatches—"

"All safe, suh, right here to hand, suh," said the black. "I's de doctah man, Cap'n Blake. My, but you sure is powerful shook up and bruised!"

Gradually, as the old voice rambled on and the deft hands worked, Blake relaxed. Salute Hall? He had heard of it; he had known Will Jennys at Charles Town. And this was Will Jennys' room! And then, as he lay,

tears trickled on his cheeks at hearing of how the Senegal man had brought him and died. Good faithful Toby! Eyes closed, he lay grieving until the gentle old voice roused him.

"Missy Ca'line, suh, if you feel able. Here's a pillow, suh—"

"Yes, yes, by all means—quickly!" Blake roused himself to desperate necessity. He sat up, suppressed a groan,

lay back on the pillows; a dressing-gown was belted about him. "Hurry! Tell her to hurry!"

She came in and spoke to him, took a chair beside the bed, sat looking at him. And for a moment his haste faded away and wonder returned upon him.

Now she wore a flowered satin gown with lace at her throat and bosom,



and above her smiling, dimpled features and her cool violet eyes lifted masses of gold-brushed brown hair. She was like a creature from another world, as was this place itself a vision of other-worldliness. Then necessity choked him again.

"Madam—Mistress Jennys—I cannot remain here!" he broke out. "I must have a horse—get away at once, at all costs! I have dispatches in my coat. . . . General Lincoln has surrendered Charles Town. They must get to Colonel Frances Marion at once—Colonel Marion of St. John's Parish, Berkeley—"

She leaned forward and smiled, and touched his arm with cool slim fingers.

"Quiet, please! You cannot leave here," she said. "You are not able. Perhaps, in a few days—"



"But they're after me! The dispatches must reach Marion!"

"They shall reach him." Her fingers pressed his wrist; their cool touch, her grave eyes, checked his words. "We are good patriots here, Mr. Blake. My father and brother are in the army at Charles Town. I know Mr. Marion—Colonel Marion, yes. I shall get off one of my men at once with them. You may be at ease."

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Are you alone here?"

"Oh, no! There are plenty of good friends around me. So you are John Blake of Wacamaw! My brother Will has written me of you, and of your lovely wife; she is safe?"

"In Charles Town, yes. Believe me, I did not mean to come here. I was making for the river—"

"Your man brought you. Now, about these dispatches—" She turned, pulled forward the chair on which his clothes were arranged, and frowned. "We must get rid of this uniform before the British arrive. You can have some of Will's clothes. Is he well?"

"Yes. Your father, I believe, was slightly wounded; nothing of consequence. In the inner pocket, madam, there is a packet—"

She was searching the blue-and-buff coat with swift hands. From it she drew out a thick packet wrapped in soiled blue cloth. She stared at it, bewildered.

Blake smiled. "Open it, open it! The dispatches are inside. Careful of the miniature; it was painted in Charles Town three months ago, and I cherish it. My wife, madam."

FROM the cloth came a miniature, a handsome one set under crystal, the outer edges bound with exquisitely chased gold. An involuntary cry came from Missy Ca'line at its beauty; she held it up admiringly, looking at the smiling dark-haired young woman.

A compact little sheaf of letters appeared. She tucked them into her

bosom, and popped the miniature in after.

"I'll find some better protection for this precious thing," she exclaimed. "She is very lovely, and sha'n't be carried so carelessly."

"Not carelessly, believe me," said Blake. "But I left in the greatest haste."

The blue cloth had fallen in folds about her lap. With an exclamation, she held it up.

"Why, it's a flag!"

So it was; a flag of plain blue, with a white crescent in one corner, points uppermost.

"I carried it away so the British might not capture it," Blake explained. "Aye, our own South Carolina flag, Mistress Jennys—the first flag of our Revolution! It's the very flag that flew above Sullivan's Island, now called Fort Moultrie, in '76, when the enemy fleet were so badly beaten. It's been flying above Charles Town late-

night, that good faithful man of yours is to be laid to rest."

"I'll walk if it kills me," said Blake. So he did, although with difficulty. Clouds had come up and rain was in the air; a soft, lush breeze swept up from the rice-fields, and sputtering pitch-pine torches cast a ruddily uncertain glow on the live-oaks and the black faces clustering about the grave,

was filled in; the torches were extinguished. Still the voices drifted after them, as Blake hobbled back to the house with Caroline Jennys beside him. He barely made it, and dropped to rest on the gallery steps.

"Weaker than I thought," he said. Then, presently, he went in, and saw the fine furniture, the portraits, the silver, the beautiful things all around.

"They mustn't find me here," he said in sudden fear for her. "You'll lose all this; they'll burn and loot—they're doing it all through the Low Country! Not the British altogether, but our own people—the Tories—"

"And many a Tory plantation, too, has been looted and burned," she said. "But we'll talk of that in the morning, Mr. Blake."



"Why, it's a flag!" Mistress Jennys said. "I carried it away so the British might not capture it," Blake explained.

ly, together with the Stars and Stripes; but this ensign means far more to us, I fear, than does the emblem of the Congress. To our men, at least, our State militia, it stands for freedom and victory and hope."

"Is that why you brought it?"

"Not entirely; also from sentiment. My father was killed under it in that first battle of the war."

"Very well; it's safe here," she responded, and rose. "I'll get these letters off by our best man, our best horse, on the instant. Have no fear; they'll reach Mr. Marion tomorrow. The British will never suspect a slave of carrying dispatches." She hesitated, and looked at him again. "And if you're able to walk a little, to-

and on the figure of Missy Ca'tine as she read the burial service.

Blake was not ashamed of his emotion. Toby had served him and his father before him from the earliest days of the war, and had sealed this fidelity with the final fullness of devotion. The pine coffin was let down, the reading came to an end. From the circling darkness the soft richness of an unseen baritone struck up a chant, and the chorus of voices swelled in sudden unison:

A tremblin' woman and a tremblin' man,
God gwine hold you with a tremblin' hand—

The voices wafted on and on, in one spiritual after another; the grave

"But you've no protection! God knows when your menfolk will be back!"

"I'm capable of doing whatever's necessary," she replied with quiet strength. "And the great thing is not to be afraid. When one does not fear a thing, it seldom happens."

He went back to bed, groaning to himself at thought of her peril here; well he knew how ruthless and savage was this war of neighbor against neighbor. Such plantations as this were self-sufficient, each a little settlement to itself; all through the back country they had been wiped out.

He must not bring destruction upon this lovely place, upon this woman! His own wife was safe in Charles Town; the fall of that city meant that British forces would flood over the entire country, almost unopposed. He fell asleep upon the resolve that with morning he must somehow mount and ride, or find a boat and take to the river—

He wakened to rain against the wind-panes. His uniform had van-



An unseen baritone struck up a chant: "A tremblin' woman and a tremblin' man,

ished. In its place were linen and garments of the absent Will Jennys; but when he tried to dress, he was appalled by the stiffness and weakness of his hurt body. The black houseman, Jules by name, came with a breakfast tray and helped him to dress. The showers were clearing off already in a dash of dripping sunlight. He spoke of the river and a boat—the river must be close, for all plantations backed on a river or stream in the rice-country.

"Lawd, suh! Missy Ca'line won't hear to that," said Jules. "No, suh. If we— 'Scuse me, suh. They's wanting me."

Voices rang somewhere below, voices of haste and excitement. Jules disappeared. Blake attacked his breakfast hungrily, and was at the last of it when a knock came at his door.

"Come in, come in," he rejoined. To his astonishment, Missy Ca'line stepped into the room, her eyes like stars and a spot of color in her cheeks, all conventions forgotten.

"No, no! No time for that," she cried, hastily checking his greeting. "They're here, they're coming up the drive—dragoons!"

"I feared as much," exclaimed Blake. "Send someone with me to the river—"

"Impossible. Stay as you are. Be my brother Will—do you understand? You must! They'll suspect nothing. My brother—a hunting accident! Indeed, Mr. Blake, it may afford us great protection," she hurried on in a storm of words that brooked no protest. "It will make all safe for you. None of our people will let anything slip; I'll warn them. Yes?"

"Why, of course, if you think it will afford any protection—"

"I'll send Jules to help you down, then," she said, and was gone hastily.

Blake adjusted his cravat with care. Dragoons, eh? Tarleton's men, then; they had the worst name of all, except the Tory partisans. Well, it should be safe enough. The presence of a man in the house would cer-

tainly serve to restrain ebullient spirits or over-free actions. After all, he thought, many of these enemies were fine fellows; they had their good and bad ones.

Jules appeared, panting.

"My hair, Jules," said Blake, seating himself. "How often have I told you to tie the knot tighter?"

Jules cackled with mirth and went to work.

DOWNSTAIRS an officer very gay in dragoon uniform and helmet was bowing to Caroline Jennys, giving his name as Captain Horton, of Colonel Tarleton's staff. He motioned forward another man who had entered with him, a sallow-checked man in the royal uniform.

"And this, madam, is Mr. Giles Fraser," he went on. "A loyal subject of His Majesty, who is serving as a volunteer in our armed forces and hopes for a commission later. Aren't your estates somewhere around here, Fraser?"



God gwine hold you with a tremblin' hand—"

"No; to the south, on the Combahee. Your servant, Mistress Jennys," said he, his eyes busy with her as he bowed.

She gave him only a hard, cold look in return, and he flushed. She knew of him. - Giles Fraser was a Tory, a Loyalist. Small blame to him for that; but he went farther. He used his knowledge of the Low Country and its people to mark off the rebel plantations; he had raided all through the Yemasee with a troop of horse, killing and looting and burning.

"You are welcome, Captain Horton," she said, "if you have business with me. I can't sav as much for your friend Mr. Fraser, who is no ornament to his uniform."

Horton laughed. He was a hearty, red-cheeked man, and his laugh was hearty, and his blue eyes were hard and truculent; but he had the calm assurance of a gentleman.

"Gad, Fraser! You well said we had dropped into a rebel nest!" he exclaimed, and then gave Missy Ca'line

a smile. "Your pardon for the word, madam. I understand that the sentiments of this plantation and its neighbors are with the rebels, however. May I ask if you are harboring any patriot officers, as you call them, escaped from Charles Town?"

"There is no one here," she replied, "except my brother, Will Jennys, who was injured in a fall from a horse while hunting. I have sent for him."

"Eh, mistress?" exclaimed Fraser, giving her a sharp look. "I heard something about your father and brother being prisoners in Charles Town, it seems—"

"Damme, Fraser, would you question a lady's word? Enough!" said Captain Horton, a snap in his voice. "With Mistress Jennys' permission I shall remain here, make this house my headquarters for a day or two, and get my report written. Take command of the men and ride on up the river, and see what you can learn of that rogue Blake; and be back here by

night. You can give us quarters, Mistress Jennys?"

"You, yes, and your men," she replied without compromise. "But if Giles Fraser of Combahee sets any foot in this house it's as an enemy and not as a guest."

FRASER bowed, with a black look and a silent snarl, and departed, his spurs jingling. His voice snapped at the troopers outside, and they rode back down the avenue.

"Well," said Captain Horton, whimsically, "you may have to take him under your roof tonight, madam, but perhaps I can arrange to spare you further hardship."

She gave him no smile. "Do I understand that you have business with me, sir?"

"Aye," said Horton, and sighed. "I've been told that a plantation, such as this, usually maintains slaves whose sole business is hunting. Is that true, madam?"

"It is."

"Then for God's sake I pray you put it to the proof, because I've not had a square meal in weeks, and I've heard much of your game hereabouts! Cannot your hospitality extend this far, at least?"

She relaxed at this, and warmed, and a smile touched her lips. She heard Blake on the stairs and her fears lifted. 'If Fraser had remained here—dear God!

"We'll do our best for you, sir!" she said, and gave him her hand. He bent over it, and did not make the mistake of kissing it, but touched her fingers with his lips as a gentleman should. "And this is my brother Will. Here, Will, is a King's officer come to guest with us—Captain Horton, I believe was the name."

Aided by Jules, Blake was coming forward, walking stiffly. He returned Horton's bow with some difficulty.

"You're welcome to Sanute Hall, Captain Horton," he said. "At this door hospitality begins and, I trust, partisan feelings end. I regret that I'm somewhat crippled at the moment, due to a fall from my horse."

"It must have been a rebel horse, egad!" exclaimed Horton, laughing.

"No, a Loyalist horse that could not bear a patriot in the saddle!" Blake smiled and turned to Missy Ca'line. "Caroline, my dear, where did your house-cleaning leave my tobacco and pipes?"

"You'll find them all in the library, Will."

"Oh! Captain Horton, you have an orderly?"

The officer shook his head. "Not here, alas! Not even saddlebags. We galloped off post-haste to run down an escaping rebel officer—one Blake, I understand, who broke through our

place. I caught him and his raiders, and there was a killing—but he got away. And when I carried a flag of truce to the British headquarters outside Charles Town, he was there. If he comes back tonight, I must avoid him."

"You can keep your bed, of course," she said, and disappeared.

Blake stuffed a pipe, glanced at the books on the walls, and thought of Giles Fraser of Combahee—a man as deadly in patriot eyes as a water-moccasin. Presently a heavy tread and the jingle of spurs heralded Captain Horton. Shaved and washed and refreshed, the Britisher hailed the tobacco joyously and seized on a pipe. Blake decided to plunge.

"Tell me what your visit betokens, sir. I hear that Charles Town has fallen; you are, therefore, conquerors. I need not say that Tarleton's Horse have a devilish bad name for raiding and looting. Is that your business?"



"You haven't agreed as yet," Blake told him. "Say the word and—"
Fraser fired point-blank.

lines—and have been in the field for two days past."

"Then you'll want to freshen up, Jules!" Blake beckoned the houseman. "Show Captain Horton to the spare chamber, see that he has everything he may desire, and then bring him to the library. Perhaps we may take a pipe together, sir, in the garden, if the rain is past."

Horton tramped up the stairs after Jules.

"YOU'D better show me the library," said Blake under his breath. Missy Ca'line smiled and led him to a little room lined with books, its table bearing a rack of churchwarden pipes and a tobacco jar.

"You did well," she said quietly, as he sank into a chair. She opened a window and threw back shutters; the rainy-earth scent came into the room, and a shaft of sunlight.

"Thank you. The dispatches got off?"

"As promised. I'll leave you; I must see to many things. Can you talk with him and show no anger?"

Blake laughed. "Bless you, he's a fine fellow! Aye, trust me. But I was listening on the stairs. That man Fraser—there's danger! He knows me."

"Oh!" she said, her eyes wide. "Giles Fraser of Combahee!"

"Right. My father thrashed him once, before the war. He burned our

Horton looked startled. "No, 'pon my word!" Seizing the silver lighter, he blew the slow-match up and held it to his pipe, then relaxed. "I'll be frank. You're listed as rebel sympathizers. My only business is to run down this chap Blake. Later, I warn you, we'll be seizing horses, forage, food, anything that can be turned up. If you'll take my advice you'll hide all your things of value, and bestow your very charming sister in Charles Town."

Blake nodded. "Thanks, sir. Why, may I ask, is such a search being made for this man Blake, rather than others?"

"Dispatches!" Horton winked sagely. "We've sure information from Charles Town sources that he carried papers of vital import to the rebel cause. That's it in a nutshell."

"Oh! Your sources must be excellent!"

"His Majesty is well served," Horton said complacently. "Well, sir, the



showers are past. Do you feel able to take a turn in the open?"

"By all means. You must see those rear gardens of ours; we're proud of them—"

Blake refilled his pipe. Horton's looks and reflective glances made him a trifle uneasy; he was glad when they started for the main drawing-room, whose French windows opened upon a terrace of the gardens. They were passing through the music-room when Horton stopped and pointed to the spinet by the window.

"Seriously, my friend, is that wise—under the circumstances? I know many a man who would tear it down in a passion."

An ejaculation broke from Blake. The blue crescent flag was draped over the spinet; he could imagine with what arrogant defiance Missy Ca'line had put it there. He folded it up and tucked it out of sight.

"I think Mistress Jennys did that," observed Horton, chuckling. "Oh, a rare young woman! I loved the way she stood up to us, in the hall! And

that rogue Fraser's face, too. By the way, if your wound troubles you—"

"I have no wound," said Blake. "Stiffness and bruises, and a bad gash from a stone."

"Oh!" said the other, in an odd tone. Then, as the view of the gardens broke upon them, he dissolved in admiration, so genuine and enthusiastic as to check all other thoughts.

Straight before them ran a spacious walk for a thousand feet, bordered with flowers set in patterns; on the left was a sunken bowling-green edged with laurels and huge live-oaks. Then to left and right were pools and fishponds and fountains to afford a water prospect, always desirable in a garden; and beyond all these, at the end of the walk, was a small artificial lake set with an island in the center, and upon the island a Grecian temple in miniature.

"Egad, sir, a sweet place, a sweet place!" exclaimed Horton. Blake saw that the Britisher's admiration was going to outdo his own abilities, and slowed.

"Sorry," he said, hobbling to a bench close at hand. "Here ends my

walk. You go ahead; enjoy the place at leisure."

"No, no; I'll finish my pipe here." Horton sat down, sighing. "What rare beauty! And I thought the colonies were a wilderness. A pity that war must touch this beauty."

"Aye, if it must."

"But by whose choice, sir?" said Horton gravely. "Your father, I understand, is one of the leaders in revolt against His Majesty. The name of Jennys is well known."

"And unblemished, in the sight of Americans."

"Come, your pardon; I forgot myself!" Horton turned to him, smiling. Then the smile faded. "Ha! I have it now."

"What, then?"

"Why, where I've seen your face before. At our headquarters; a flag of truce—eh? Some resemblance, no doubt; I've a cursed poor memory for faces at best. Well, say no more about it; bear with me, kind host—after all, the guest in the house is entitled to his fancies, eh? Ah, here comes Mistress Jennys; stay where you are—I'll go meet her!"

HORTON laid down his pipe and went to meet Missy Ca'line, who was coming down the walk. Blake sat stupefied.

Now he saw the reason for Horton's looks; the latter had recognized him long ere this, and had, in awkward fashion, chosen to say so and put him at rest. The kindly Britisher, who by his eye could be harsh enough at need, did not suspect him of being Blake; merely knew him as a rebel officer who had come with a flag of truce; and speaking of this, affected to regard it as a passing fancy.

"Hm! He thinks Will Jennys was wounded, got away from Charles Town, and should be set at ease about it!" Blake was startled, yet amused. "All the more reason to avoid that scoundrel Giles Fraser, who would assuredly know John Blake! I must arrange to clear out of here tonight."

Missy Ca'line had laid aside her hauteur, warming to Horton; they were laughing and talking together, with noon dinner of wild turkey in prospect. All three returned slowly to the house. Here Horton asked for writing-materials; he wanted to prepare his report and send it off when evening brought his troopers back. So he went at it, and Blake sat in the music-room with Missy Ca'line, who tinkled at the spinet with idle fingers.

"He noted the flag, so I took it back," said Blake, and went on to tell her of the recognition. "He supposes that I'm really your brother! A fine fellow; I like him."

"Too bad I had to lie to him when he arrived; not that the lie troubles

me!" she said, laughing softly. "So you'll not trust me with your precious flag, eh?"

"I'll not endanger you with it, at least. It belongs in the field; the present is for hope, and just now the cause is in bitter need of hope! I must get away tonight if possible."

"But your hurts—"

"I pretend them far worse than they are."

She eyed him doubtfully. "If they catch you, what will they do?"

Blake smiled. "Nothing. Kill me if I run, take me prisoner if I stay. If I'm put on parole, I can't fight again during the war: that's why I broke through their lines. Those who surrendered with Charles Town will be kept as prisoners, or paroled. It's not me they want, but those dispatches."

He patted the flag, folded and stuffed beneath his coat. He had no intention of parting with it; to him, as to others, it stood for a great deal. It was the actual flag which had seen the British fleet battered and broken and smashed, which had waved all South Carolina into the patriot cause. The flag of the United Colonies meant little, in comparison with this, to the men of the Low Country and the long sea islands. And now that all was broken and lost again, and Charles Town in British hands—well, the crescent flag would wave them on to new efforts for the cause of liberty!

"Oh! That reminds me!" she exclaimed, rising and crossing the room to a cabinet, and returning with something in her hand. "Here, this is for you. I could not bear to think of that lovely miniature wrapped up in a bit of cloth! Now it will be quite safe."

ASTONISHED, he inspected the flat brass box in his hand. It was decorated with graving and carried a crest. It opened to his touch; it was five by four inches. There, nestling in a bed of faded silk, was his wife's miniature.

"Splendid!" he cried. "Why, it might have been made for the purpose!"

Amusement twitched at her lips. "It was not. When my grandfather came out from England, he brought several pairs of spectacles; this was the case for them. Now it's put to even better use."

"And you have my deepest gratitude, madam," said he, wrapping the brass case in the flag. He tried vainly to stick the packet into a pocket of Will Jennys' coat. "Ha! I'll have to pocket 'em separately. You see the advantages of a uniform? My blue and buff would hold this in the breast pocket without a qualm, and a chicken in each side pocket. With your leave I'll put these safe in my room."

"And come back to help with the wild turkey," she said, laughing after him. . . .

The rain had vanished, the sun was clear, looking back upon it afterward, Blake found nothing sinister or ominous in the day. Snatches of song drifted in from the field hands and gardeners. The lordly dining-room, glittering with cut glass and silver, was gay with sunlight.

Caroline Jennys, too, was gay and gracious. Horton might have been some old friend, to judge from his boyish camaraderie; it was plain that he held Caroline Jennys in awe and admiration. Jules served the feast with beaming delight—and it was a feast to make any Britisher open his eyes, though venison and wild turkey were no holiday fare at Sanute Hall.

The wine was sound. Horton toasted the King; Blake drank with Missy Ca'line to General Washington; they drank all three to the absent paterfamilias, sturdy Gregory Jennys, who sat a prisoner in Charles Town. Captain Horton urged that his hostess hide all valuables, leave the plantation, and go to the city until the troubles were over, and proffered his services.

She laughed. "Then who'd keep the plantation running?"

"There are plenty of good men on parole," struck in Blake. "I can't be here, my dear, but others can."

That was an idea, certainly. They discussed it seriously while the feast progressed, the time had run well into the afternoon. They were sitting over the port and walnuts when Jules came in and went to Missy Ca'line, with a low word. She looked up at Horton.

"Your droopers are coming up the avenue, Captain Horton. Must that insufferable man come in?"

"Bear with him this one time, sweet lady," said Horton. "I'll pack him off to headquarters with my report, egad! That's why I got it wrote."

"Then let them in when they come, Jules," she said.

Blake rose, catching her glance.

"Your pardon; Caroline, will you excuse me? Jules, when you're free come up to my room. This leg is aching consumedly, and I'd like you to rub it with liniment. Captain Horton, your servant—wine with you, sir, in token of *au revoir*!"

They lifted glasses and emptied them; then Blake went hobbling upstairs, looking far worse than he felt. He knew Jules would bring him word of what happened below.

There was a window above the stairs, looking out upon the drive. From there he could look down at a dozen dragoons sitting their horses beyond the gallery; with them were a pair of civilians, who looked like

swamp hunters or small farmers—Torries, no doubt, since they were talking and laughing with the dragoons.

Giles Fraser of Combahee, a triumphant expression in his sharp and sallow features, followed Jules into the dining-room. He bowed to Missy Ca'line, who ignored him completely, and nodded to the officer.

"I've word for your private ear, by your leave."

"Nonsense, man!" said Horton, in high good humor after his dinner. Missy Ca'line started to rise; he motioned her back. "No, no, let's have it here. Any word of the man Blake we're after?"

FRASER smiled slightly. He was dusty and reeked of horse and sweat. Over his shoulder was an old-fashioned sling that carried two pistols at his hip.

"Apparently, yes," he said, unhurried. Horton poured wine, filling his glass, and extended it.

"My apologies, Mistress Jennys. Here, man, drink this and talk less dryly!"

"Thank you." Fraser bowed, mockingly, and drank the wine and put down the glass. "I've picked up a couple of honest fellows, good loyal fellows, who carry passes from Colonel Tarleton himself. They sighted our man yesterday. He was riding double, or was being held in the saddle by a black."

"Ha!" cried Horton. "Then it was his horse that was shot!"

"Evidently," said Fraser. He shot a malicious glance at Missy Ca'line, who sat straight and still and cold, her eyes angry upon him. "He was seen on the highway below here, and assuredly did not go on to the Ashley plantation or would have been seen."

"Well?" demanded Horton.

Fraser paused. A black man had come into the dining-room by the service door; he was dusty and weary, and ducked his head at Missy Ca'line, not speaking until ordered.

"Well, Peter?" she said. "Did you do the errand?"

"Yes, Missy Ca'line," he rejoined. "And I got a writing to show it done."

"Then give it to Mr. Will," she said indifferently. "You'll find him up in his room."

Peter bobbed his head and went out; this was the man who had departed the previous evening with the dispatches for Colonel Marion.

Jules was hovering about. Fraser caught the eye of Horton and gestured slightly.

"Oh, damme, out with your news, if you have any!" exclaimed Horton. "What was it—two informers, you said?"

"Aye, and with right good information, too. According to them, Mr.

Jennys has not returned from Charles Town. They have, in fact, been watching for him or for his father, either one, and have a number of blacks out on watch. One of these blacks reported that a horse carrying double turned in at this plantation entrance yesterday. Under no circumstances would I cast any aspersion on the statements of Mistress Jennys," he added with smooth sarcasm, "so it is quite evident that she knew nothing of the matter, and equally evident that the quicker a search is made of this entire place, the better."

Missy Ca'line motioned imperceptibly and Jules departed.

"Why—why—damme! I don't know what to make of this!" exclaimed Horton in dismay.

"It is quite clear," she said calmly. "This man is charging me with having Captain Blake hidden somewhere about the place."

"Nor at all, madam," said Fraser, now more bitterly sarcastic. Unbidden, he stepped forward and seated himself. "At a venture, I'd say that this mysterious brother of yours, whom as yet I haven't laid eyes on, is no other than the rascal we're after."

"Come, come, Fraser, don't be absurd," broke out Horton. "This lady surely knows her own brother; so do the servants—why, damme, it's posterous!"

"It's nothing of the sort," said Fraser, abandoning all pretense. Malignity flashed in his eye. He hitched the pistols around and relaxed comfortably. "I warned you this was a rebel nest, Cap'n Horton. You've fallen in to the snare of a pretty face and a charming person. And don't come any British bluster over me, either. I'm not one of your subordinates. I know how to deal with these rebels. Give me permission to make use of your men, and I'll turn up this scoundrel Blake within ten minutes."

Horton's gaze sought that of Missy Ca'line. "Deny it, madam—deny it, and I'll take your word of honor gladly! Why, you've already given me your word yesterday! Let's have your brother down here and settle this nonsense!"

"And put the place to the torch," said Fraser, "as due punishment for harboring rebels! Faith, I'd like to clap eyes on this Will Jennys!"

"Then so you shall!" said a voice from the doorway, and they swung around.

BLAKE stood there with a big brass horse-pistol cocked in either hand. Missy Ca'line went white as death. He was wearing his stained, torn blue-and-buff uniform, and over the pistols his dark eyes danced at the two men.

"Blake, by God!" cried Fraser in a choked voice.

"Rather, by God's grace," said Blake cheerfully. "Steady, gentlemen! One move, and I fire. You may call your troopers, but you'll be dead ere they get in here. These are your own pistols, Horton, and good ones they are. Now let's settle our affairs."

"Are you actually Blake?" demanded Horton, storm gathering in his eyes.

"I am. And I propose to surrender myself as your prisoner. But first, I propose to escort Giles Fraser of Combahee into the garden, where I'll give him one of your pistols and a shot at me, in order that I may kill him in more gentlemanly fashion than he deserves. Then I'll put myself at your service. Do you agree?"

Horton was dumfounded. Comprehension flashed across his face. Then he looked at Missy Ca'line, who was regarding Blake in mute tragic protest; and Blake read his thought.

"Don't reproach her, Horton, because she lied to you yesterday. You'd lie for your King, or for a woman's honor. She beswore herself to save a helpless hurt stranger, and I respect her for it, and so should you."

"Well said! And so I do, egad!" cried Horton, half rising.

One of the pistols jerked. "Steady! You haven't agreed as yet," Blake told him. "Say the word, and—"

Fraser slid one of the pistols from his sling, and fired pointblank. At that short distance he could not miss. Nor did he. At the explosion, at the roaring gush of smoke, Blake was knocked a step backward as the ball hit. The pistols dropped out of his hands. He clutched at the doorway, swayed, then fell in a huddle and lay quiet.

Caroline Jennys screamed, clapped hands over her lips, sat staring with eyes of horror. A rush of feet and voices sounded. Blacks broke into the room with quavering cries. From the front, the dragons came bursting into the house. Fraser, smiling thinly, stood up.

"Straight to the heart and well shot," said he complacently. Horton pushed him aside and stooped over the body of Blake; he rose, as his men came running, and held his own brass pistols, and in his features lay a fury of emotion.

"All right, men; out with you!" he said. "Fraser, come along outside with us. I want a word with you."

He motioned, and Fraser, smiling, swaggered away with the dragons. Horton followed, out to the drive in front of the house where the horses were standing. Here he faced around

"So Gallantly Streaming," the next story in this series, deals with an historical event famous indeed.

and held out one of his pistols to Fraser.

"The rebel had the right of it. Here, you damned blackguard! Take this, walk away from me, and at the count of three turn and fire. Quick, by the living God! Sergeant, give the word to us! Speak up!"

Fraser took the pistol, jaw-fallen, eyes stabbing fury and dismay.

"One!" roared out the sergeant. Horton was pacing away slowly. Fraser gulped out a word.

"Two!" came the count. Quickly, he stepped off.

"Three!"

Fraser swung about, Horton turned steadily, composedly; lifted his weapon. That of Fraser belched smoke and sound. Horton took deliberate aim—and fired. Fraser uttered a choked sound and fell, shot between the eyes. The smoke lifted and cleared. Horton looked at the scene, then threw down the pistol.

"Bury Mr. Fraser somewhere," said he to the sergeant, and went back into the house.

HE came to the dining-room and the crowding blacks stepped away. Missy Ca'line was on her knees, lifting Blake's head; tears were on her cheeks, fluttering words on her lips. Blake's eyes opened, and met the gaze of Horton.

"Oh! Hello, there," he said faintly. "Gad! Feels as though a horse had kicked me."

He put a hand inside his uniform coat, and grimaced. Missy Ca'line was staring into his face, her lips parted.

"You—you're not dead!" she cried out. "Where is—where is the wound?"

"Let me help, here," Horton dropped on one knee. "Blake—here, let me unbutton your coat. Egad! What the deuce is this?"

The coat came open. From within it fell the blue crescent flag, wadded about a brass box that was crushed and distorted. And wedged into the brass was the ball from Fraser's pistol. Horton caught it up, and a little shower of glass and porcelain flinders fell from it.

Blake gaped at the thing and caught his breath. His eyes lifted to those of Caroline in wonder and awe.

"The miniature—the brass case—"

Horton rose, took his hand, pulled him erect, and burst into a laugh.

"Thank the Lord! You're my prisoner, Blake—on parole, eh?"

"With all my heart," said Blake. "I must go back to Charles Town—and— and get another miniature done of my wife."

But Missy Ca'line stooped, and gathered up the blue crescent flag—and that was how it came to wave again for Sumter and Marion's men, and freedom.

Rocky Mountain



The Story Thus Far:

BILL KENNEDY, coming to Seattle from the mining country up north, shortly after the death of his father Hod Kennedy, had no intention of revenging himself on Red Schafer, who by chicanery had cheated the elder Kennedy of valuable mining claims. Hod himself had said: "Forget it, son—just call it the luck of the draw, and go on from there."

But waiting for Bill in the crowded lobby of the Hotel Chanford was the mining promoter "Rocky" Flynn—a battle-scarred old wolf in sheep's clothing—who under plea of "cutting Hod's son in on a good deal," offered Bill five thousand dollars to attest to Ruth MacRae (a young woman who was demanding an investigation after her investment of eighty thousand dollars had been reported lost) that Rocky and his partner Whitey Bodine had lost her money in attempts to develop an alleged body of ore on the shore of a tiny and remote mountain lake, named—by Rocky—Luna Lake, and that the mine had failed solely because the ore had petered out.

Bill refused flatly but—somewhat under the influence of repeated drinks of Rocky's "squareface"—he later entered, with Rocky, a shady gambling-den and bar known as De Silva's.

Here Red Schafer gave Bill derisive greeting; Bill forgot his intention to ignore Red, and a fight followed in an adjacent alley. Red was knocked out; his head struck a cement ledge as he fell, and he was later pronounced dead.

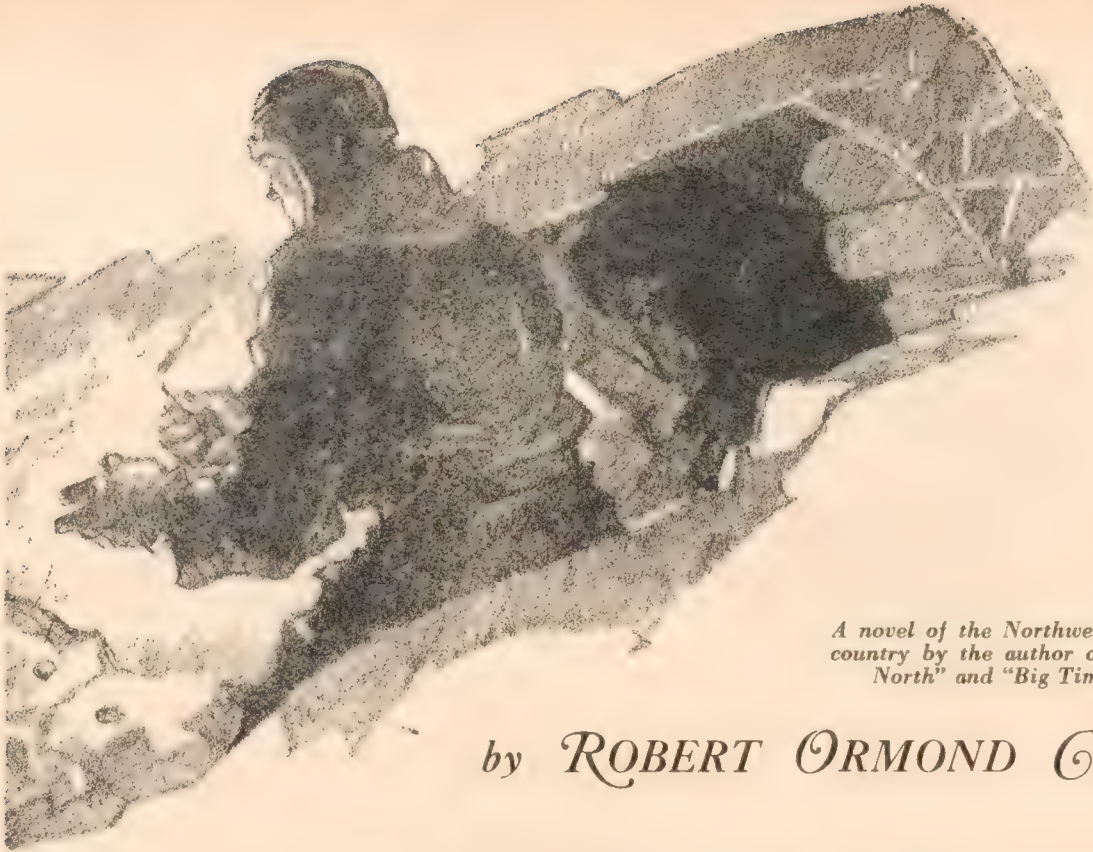
Bill, dazed with horror, was hurried away by Rocky from the gathering crowd—was rushed to the airport and out to a big amphibian, its motors idling. Here he met Rocky's partner Whitey Bodine, and an attractive young woman introduced as Ruth MacRae, whom Bill recognized as a childhood acquaintance, one of the "rich MacRaes." Without any delay Whitey took off with Bill, Ruth and

Rocky as passengers, bound for Luna Lake, by way of Prince Rupert.

Realizing he had been trapped by Rocky into a jam, Bill decided to play this his own way. At the first stop, Prince Rupert, he offered to write a report that the ore-vein was exhausted, but that a "substantial amount" had been spent on the mine; this should clear Rocky and Whitey with Ruth. Bill would not, however, return to Seattle; he would outfit here, and from Luna Lake he would make it on foot for some point in the North.

Agreeing to this, Whitey said: "Rock and I'll pick up the equipment; you and Miss MacRae wait for us here."

During the wait, Ruth—who knew nothing of Bill's plan, and did not trust any of the three—wrote a letter to the Provincial Police, telling of her impending investigation of the mine; to test Bill, she asked him to mail it. He pretended to do so, but instead



A novel of the Northwest mining country by the author of "Wings North" and "Big Timber."

by *ROBERT ORMOND CASE*

slipped it into his pocket, fearing to leave a trail which the police could follow and seize him for Red Schaffer's death. Ruth's suspicions were allayed and when the flight was resumed, she became wholly friendly.

Bill's first sight of remote Luna Lake brought realization of the all-but-impossible task he had set for himself: to attempt a journey on foot in any direction in these lonely and turbulent wilds would be highly hazardous. But he went forward doggedly with his prearranged plan. Investigation of the mine showed evidence of operations amply justifying a report exonerating Whitey and Rocky from a charge of misappropriating Ruth's money; in fact, certain fragments of ore lying about caused Bill to suspect that they had perhaps succeeded better than they wished to admit—and later, faced with it, Rocky reluctantly confessed to Bill that this was indeed true. It seemed a time of confessions: for in the mine Ruth, in tears, told Bill that the money she had sunk here was not her own, but the entire capital of her aged aunts, entrusted to her for safe investment. The MacRaes had fallen on hard times since her childhood, and Ruth herself was penniless.

Bill, not wishing to raise her hopes without confirmation, said nothing of his idea that the mine was really valuable; and after he had wrung the admission from Rocky, he had no further opportunity to tell her—for Whitey, who during the inspection of the mine had unloaded Bill's equipment in the tiny cabin on the slope, now declared an immediate take-off was imperative. Bill's brief talk with Rocky after Whitey and Ruth started for the plane seemed to touch the old renegade's heart; he agreed to tell Ruth the entire truth when they returned to Prince Rupert, and let her turn Whitey over to the police. Rocky went on to the plane; Bill saw it lift into the sky; he was alone in this inaccessible spot.

Entering the cabin, he halted, stupefied: Whitey had left him a sleeping-bag, and an empty pack-sack; and that was all—no rifle, no ammunition, no food-supplies! Nor was there any in the cabin. It was a death-sentence...

As he began dazedly to make a fire in the cabin stove, the threshold creaked; he turned, staring incredulously—Ruth was standing there. (*The story continues in detail:*)

"RUTH! . . . You didn't leave with the ship?"
"Obviously not. We had a bit of

an argument, and I—I preferred to jog along with you." Her smile was a little tremulous. Some late horror had left a touch of shadow in her eyes. "Sorry to intrude, and all that."

He was still gripping the stick with which he had been poking the fire. He tossed it down, dusted his hands, and crossed over to lean against the door opposite her.

She met his gaze squarely. "Please don't scold me. They said some terrible things about you, but I *know* how dangerous they are—now. . . . I'm sorry. I had no choice, really. I'll only be here until tomorrow, you know."

"Tomorrow? You mean they're coming back?"

"No—definitely not. *They* won't be back at all. They plan to maroon us here until spring. They're quite sure that we'll both be done for by then."

"Rocky agreed to that?" said Bill, aghost.

"Certainly. He said you'd understand that this had become entirely too complicated, that when the last pinch came, he must look out for Rocky Flynn. You know his quaint way of expression. . . . Does that surprise you?"

"It does," said Bill grimly. "Then Rocky knows we have no grub?"



"Then you are a criminal?" Ruth said. "I didn't believe it. It's all true, then?"

She nodded. "He even congratulated Whitey for thinking of such a foul plot. . . . They don't know, of course"—she smiled and patted her pocket—"that I've still got those four sandwiches."

Bill stared at her. *Four sandwiches.* What was back of this simple-minded, almost flippant confidence? Upon what miracle was she depending—

He remembered, just as she put it into words; and his skin crawled.

"And they don't know, fortunately," she went on, "about that letter I wrote to the Provincial Police down at Prince Rupert. *They'll* be flying over here tomorrow, looking for us. You can wait here to welcome them—or hurry on, as you please. I don't mean to disturb your plans. . . . I suppose, since you haven't food, that you'll be obliged to wait."

There was no help for it. There was no use trying to avoid it or soften the blow. He reached into his coat and into his shirt-pocket, and brought out a sealed, stamped envelope, addressed to the Provincial Police.

He held it up in the fading light, so she could see it fully.

"You're referring to this letter, I suppose?" he asked.

She took the letter from his hand and held it closer. It was plain that she couldn't at first grasp what had happened. Her glance up into Bill's grim face showed complete disbelief.

"But I *saw* you mail it!"

"You thought you did," he corrected. "I had another envelope ready, and slipped it into the box. . . . Just a little sleight of hand. Like Whitey short-changing me on the grub."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT was by far the most embarrassing moment of his life—and the most savagely humiliating. In all his contacts with her from the first—from their first meeting at the Seattle airport—he had tried to forestall any such debacle as this. He had steeled himself against her in the tunnel, when she had been in his arms. She had hurt him once. Never again, through any word or act of his, would he lay himself open to her scorn and disdain. Yet here it was; and he was utterly defenseless.

He turned to the stove, on the pretense that it needed attention. He slid back the movable top and thrust

in more wood. The cheerful fire roared, its light flickering on the cob-webbed rafters overhead.

"Better come in and close the door," he told her. "It's a touch drafty outside."

He heard the door close, and her uncertain step cross the room. The bunk creaked. He kept his back to her while he adjusted the damper. Then he turned to the corner, dragged the rough chair forward and placed it near the stove. He took off his helmet and struck the seat of the chair smartly. "Dust," he explained. "It gathers fast in an empty cabin."

He unbuttoned his leather jacket, backed up to the stove, planted himself there, and looked at her fully for the first time.

She was seated on the edge of the bunk, the letter in her folded hands. She seemed frail and small in her engulfing coat. There was but one cob-webbed window at the side of the door, and the light was dim. Her face was pale, her eyes dark and lustrous.

"Then you *are* a criminal? Wanted by the Seattle police and all that?"

"Who told you that?" he countered, still clutching at shreds and tatters of inner fortitude.

"Whitey first; then Rocky admitted it. I didn't believe it—playing the fool, as usual. . . . It's all true, then?"

"That's right."

She looked at him wonderingly, and about the cabin. She looked at the stove, the grimy shelves, twisted to appraise the equipment on the bunk. "You planned all this from the first?"

"Not this way," he said. "I thought you'd be safely back in Prince Rupert tonight. The letter wouldn't affect you."

She turned the letter over and over in her hands, then opened it and read it slowly.

"Then you'll find this amusing, I'm sure," she said, holding it out. "Read it, please."

He did so, and was plunged deeper into an abyss of shame. The brief note made no mention of him at all. It merely reported to the Provincial Police that she was accompanying Messrs. Bodine and Flynn on a flight to the Rockies north of Jasper. It was a hazardous trip. In the event they didn't return that night, the terrain should be searched east of the Finlay and south of Sifton Pass.

"It's water over the dam now," he said grimly, handing it back. "Sorry. It was a hazardous trip."

"I was partly responsible, of course," she said. "I led you to think I was telling them all about you. Actually, I was sure there was nothing wrong. It seems incredible still—naïve as I am." She slid the letter into her pocket. "D'you mind telling me about yourself? You *are* Bill Kennedy?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, Ruth." He gestured about him, with a mirthless smile. "And I live here."

"I'm not trying to humiliate you—if that's possible," she said, looking up at him steadily. "Please extend me the same courtesy. . . . Go on, please."

"Very well." There was but one thing to be done: hew to the line.

HE told her the whole story from the moment he had arrived at the hotel in Seattle, from Sumpter Valley. He did it matter-of-factly; hiding nothing, coloring nothing. It came hard, but not as hard as he had feared. Facts were facts. From rock bottom, all directions were up. . . . He described the killing in the alley, his flight, the manner in which Rocky had guided him to the Seattle airport. He placed no blame on Rocky, made no excuses for himself.

He brought the record up to the preceding hour. He had been certain of the existence of the mine only at the last. There had been no chance to tell her then. It would have been dangerous to do so. Most imperative was to get her safely back to Prince Rupert. Rocky would give her the whole picture later.

"And that's that," he concluded. "Such as it is, there it is. It isn't pretty."

She was sitting more rigidly upright on the edge of the bunk.

"You burned up my stock certificates. Why?"

"Just to impress Whitey. . . . They were recorded, so it didn't mean anything. Your lawyer would have told you that."

"But what was supposed to happen to you?" she said slowly. "I mean, after we'd all left?"

"I might make it over to the East Fork. I might not. . . . I was going to sign off here." He explained how: the burning of the cabin, the remains of the rifle in the ashes, the suicide note. "It sounds theatrical. This way's much simpler—as Whitey probably figured out. Sorry you're in on it."

She looked at him steadily, her long-lashed eyes wide and imperious.

"Do you really expect me to believe all this?"

"I expect nothing. Believe all of it, part of it, or none of it. Remember, you asked me."

"You mean you actually have no food?"

"We haven't. Or yes—four sandwiches."

"And Rocky won't—nor Whitey—nobody'll be 'ack for us?"

"I don't know. It depends on how valuable the mine is, what the stakes are. Probably not, though."

"And we can't make our way out on foot?"

"Not without food."

She got up abruptly and made her way to the door. She found the latch and leaned there for a moment, then faced him again. "But what's to become of us?"

He shrugged. "I haven't thought it out yet. At least we've got a roof over us. We won't freeze. We're not hungry—yet." He saw, with a pang of pity, that belated facts were hitting her, head on. "Easy, Ruth. Just take off your coat, and relax. We'll do some figuring, and see what adds up."

He had said the wrong thing, apparently. She opened the door. "I think I'll take a turn outside. Sort of—pull myself together."

He did not follow her. Some crises of life—he was facing one himself—must be met alone. He listened to her hurrying up the path toward the ridge, her footfalls crackling in the frost. The sound of it soon dwindled and merged into the strengthening whisper of the wind about the eaves.

BILL busied himself about the cabin, yielding to a desperate urge to be doing something. It helped dim the sense of helplessness, of being entrapped, that had come with the knowledge that there was no grub. The dilemma was thrice compounded now. With Ruth on his hands—empty-handed, without even a trail outfit—where did they go from here?

Might as well make the place livable, meanwhile: tidy it up.

He went outside, cut some spruce-boughs and bound them together into a primitive broom. He saw that plenty of wood had been cut during the summer, a considerable pile ricked up between two trees. That was on the credit side. Misty, wind-driven streamers hung suspended from the towering crests to the east. Even if there were no storm tonight, there would be bitter frost abroad on the lake. At least they had shelter.

He swept out the cabin, stood the broom in the corner, and took inventory of the few battered utensils that Rocky and Whitey, and whatever hard-rock crew had bivouacked here, had left behind. There was the bucket, teakettle, tin cups, a motley array. A square can on the shelf held perhaps a half cup of black tea. Also, tucked into the corner, was the remains of a coil of light wire which had been used to anchor the rusty stovepipe to the ceiling.

In addition to the tea, the wire was a find of proportions. It instantly suggested a possible means of opening the locked door that guarded the mine. The value of the mine was the crux of the whole situation; a mere glimpse of the deposit would answer many questions.

Might as well explore it now, he decided. It was time to check on

Ruth, in any event. First, he took the battered bucket, went down to the water's edge, broke the ice and came back with water. He put it on to boil. Nothing would bolster Ruth's courage more than hot tea.

Then he thrust the coil into his pocket, took the flashlight and rock-hammer, and headed for the ridge.

She was nowhere in sight when he emerged from the scrub timber. The ridge was empty. From this point, with the open water of the west bay hidden, the frozen surface of the lake gave the final touch to a picture of lifeless and static solitude. The sky was still bright in the west, but the towering walls were black with shadow. There was no movement other than his own, no sound except that of the wind and the distant waterfall.

Then, hurrying around the headland, he saw her up at the mine entrance, motionless as the rock at her back. She was leaning beside the tunnel, hands thrust deep in her pockets, looking out over the bay to the west. Except for turning her face toward him, she did not move as he mounted the tailings to where she stood.

He came up to her, puffing, and found her as composed and calm as when he had first met her at Boeing Field. Her head was up, her turban meticulously in place. Through some inner magic, plus a touch of make-up, no sign of weakness or tears showed on her firmly molded, almost haughty features.

"I want to take a quick look at the mine," he told her. He showed her the coil of wire. "Maybe we can break in. Then we'd better dash back to the cabin. I found some tea up on the shelf."

She smiled wanly. "Just tea? No lemon?"

"Good!" he approved. "We've met the enemy, and they are ours, eh?"

RUTH made no reply. As the blackness of the tunnel engulfed them and he snapped on the light, she did not take his arm but marched stolidly beside him.

When he came to the timber door, he handed her the flashlight.

"Hold it, please. Shine it on the crack—here, between the rock and the timber."

She held the flashlight as directed, and he crouched at the crack, peering in. The crowbar was leaning against the jagged wall inside. He gauged the distance, straightened out the wire and formed a hook on the end. "The idea is we'll fish out that bar—maybe. Then pry off the padlock."

Upsetting the crowbar was easy; it crashed and lay flat, the sound of it reëchoing in the cavern. He formed

a triple loop on the end of the wire, its coils distended so that it would tighten and cling to the end of the bar, if and when he could snare it.

It took considerable maneuvering. He inched the wire in with utmost patience, easing the coil over the roughness of the floor. Finally it was in position. He wormed it over the end of the bar and cautiously drew the wire tight. The coil clamped on some tiny roughness on the surface of the metal, and hung on.

He dragged the bar toward him slowly, got the end of it through the crack, finally was able to grasp it. He dragged it out until the swelling metal caught in the crack. By standing up and applying his full strength to it, thrusting it back and forth, he was able to drag it out.

The rest was easy. He inserted the beveled end of the bar into the staple that held the padlock and heavy hasp in place. Under his full weight, magnified many times by the short fulcrum, the heavy metal parted, and the lock fell away. He took the flashlight from her, laid hold on the door and swung it open.

The dead air of the drift smote them. The odor of ancient powder-smoke clung to the arched rock. Bill went in cautiously. There might be giant powder or caps in the debris of boxes and tools that cluttered the entrance. . . . The boxes were empty. They came to a hand mortar and a small tank that brimmed with water from a tiny but persistent seepage overhead.

Bill studied this layout with understanding eyes. Many clues told him what Whitey and Rocky had done here. After making their discovery, they had been like small boys cooking their first outdoor meal—unable to wait until the potatoes were fried and the steak well done. They had pounded out high-grade in the mortar, washed it by hand. It must be free-milling quartz, "rotten" with gold.

It was. When they came to the end of the drift and he turned his light full on the face of the cut, there was new radiance in the cavern. The vein was thick as a man's body, spangled and permeated with a lacy pattern that seemed black by contrast with the whiteness of the quartz. It was not black, but yellow: a hard-rock miner's dream. The gold was plainly visible to the eye.

IT was no mere pocket, moreover, no Comstock "bonanza." It was a true stratum that angled up across the face of the cut and so into the heart of the mountain. Its thickness was obvious; its depth could only be surmised.

But the veriest tyro would have recognized it as a huge concentration,

with values running thousands to the ton.

That's that, Bill thought, with a deep, somber thrill. *We walk out—or die.* Few men could look upon such wealth unmoved. It was that way with raw gold. Many would go to great length, any length, to control it. Near the end of that list—"way back and down"—was the name of Rocky Flynn.

He glanced at Ruth, and found her studying him, her face expressionless.

"There it is," he said. "Any question?"

"Just one. It's quite valuable?"

"Millions, probably."

Her manner of accepting this indicated that her speculations had traveled as swiftly—if not as far—as his own.

"Shall we barge along? You mentioned a spot of tea."

"Right," he agreed. "The water's probably boiling."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ON the way back to the cabin, pondering what he had seen, Bill had his moment of complete dismay. It was on Ruth's account. Up to the instant when he had glimpsed the mine, personal angles had outweighed all else: how to justify his past actions in her eyes, save face, armor himself against her critical appraisal of his motives: the trivia, not the realities, of their predicament.

Blunt facts had now emerged from those inconsequential mists. They had no food. They were separated from life by bitter, stamina-devouring miles of mountain travel. Empty-handed as she was, with no trail equipment other than the clothes she wore, she could not go far afoot. With a storm imminent, she shouldn't even leave the shelter of the cabin. Whitey and Rocky—the only living persons who knew of their presence here—had obviously gambled huge stakes that no outside rescue would reach them. . . . What was the answer?

There was but one, and it was inescapable. His instant of panic faded when the course became clear, plainly marked: Granting that Rocky himself would not return—and no clue had developed, as yet, to support that forlorn hope—there was no alternative. Ruth was entirely helpless as far as overland travel was concerned. Yet she could exist for days in the shelter of the cabin—weeks, even. For him to do likewise, waiting for slow death with folded hands, was unthinkable.

Therefore he must strike out at once for the East Fork: food or no food, chance or no chance.

It had to be tonight, after a few preliminary chores: bring in plenty of

wood; explain the grim facts to Ruth; have their spot of tea. An hour hence, with the moon strengthening over the mighty eastern ramparts, the snowfields would be almost as bright as day. It might be hours before the threatened storm broke, if at all. Those hours, in the dim, stumbling, reeling home-stretch, might be the essential margin.

THE cabin was squat and gloomy in the deepening shadows. He led the way past it and into the timber. "We're monarchs of all we survey," he said over his shoulder. "Let's take a quick look at the glacier. And the north bank."

They went through a small, man-made clearing where considerable stove-wood was ricked between two trees. He had seen it before, while making his broom, and he appraised it now with new satisfaction. Such as it was, there was Ruth's insurance against storms. The timber thinned out at the foot of a vast moraine that sloped down from the north shoulder of the glacier. He paused there and flashed his light toward the sky.

Up yonder was the only way out afoot: along the crest of the rim to the left, then north past the base of a towering escarpment and so out upon the open, unprotected face of the mountain. What waited there was hidden from this point. The far, turbulent miles to the East Fork were hidden.

It came to Bill, facing realities on his own account, that his only knowledge of that terrain had come from Rocky Flynn. Rocky had said sketchily, in their hotel room at Prince Rupert: "It's maybe sixty miles, as the snow flies. But what miles! And you won't be flying, son." The trail might actually be impassable afoot. Even at that point, that early in the game, Rocky might have planned to copper all bets.

And still, in the end, that was the only way out.

He turned the flashlight briefly up to the face of the glacier, and a hundred crevasses and vertical grooves of ice threw back a gloomy reflection. There was something symbolic about this dead, static monster. Its bulk, plainly enough, had once choked the entire bowl as far as the gap; and through countless centuries, grudging inch by inch, its face had sloughed off under the erosion of wind, sun and storm.

Except for the scrub spruce, the willows and the spongy turf underfoot, it appeared that nothing that moved, breathed or took root had followed its retreat. There were probably no fish in the chill lake, since the waterfall choked migration upstream. There was no clue that any sort of

wild life had ever roamed this lost patch of timber.

"Okay," he said, turning back. "We've seen it."

Darkness was deepening fast. The weight of what lay ahead was growing by the minute. It came to Bill, with an overwhelming rush of pity for her, that Ruth would bear the greater load. Of the separate trails both must follow, hers was by far the more formidable. He would be struggling on hour by hour, the physical battle of it dimming the knowledge, that even his greatest effort was probably hopeless. She could do nothing but wait—wait through interminable days and lonely terrifying nights.

How best prepare her, spiritually, for such a haul? To leave her with complete despair in her heart was unthinkable. But was it right, was it fair, to bolster her resolution with utterly false hope?

As they crossed the clearing and came into the shadows by the cabin, he grasped her arm to help her over the rough going. It was merely a courteous, protective gesture, in line with his aching thoughts, but she wrenched herself free: it was an almost desperate reflex. She shrank away from him, beyond arms'-length and farther. She was backing up the path that led toward the open ridge.

HE halted at once, and leaned against the corner of the cabin, his back to the rough logs. She halted too, facing him but poised for instant flight.

"Easy, Ruth," he said gently. This was by far the most disheartening thing that had happened to him at Luna Lake. "We're in this together. Don't be afraid of me."

"Sorry I'm so jumpy," she said. "Just—don't touch me." Her hands came together and entwined. "This is all quite impossible, of course."

"Let's discuss it inside. It's too cold here." He extended the flashlight: "Take this." When she made no move, he tossed it down at her feet. Because he was so deeply touched, his voice was brusque: "Pick it up. Turn it on."

She did so, and the blazing eye fastened upon his face. "You see?" he said. "It's no stranger. No wolf in the bushes. Just that well-known crook and murderer Bill Kennedy. You've seen him around."

"But—but what can we do? What are your plans?"

"Just discuss mutual problems," he said. "Over a spot of tea. Just look facts in the face. Maybe we'll thumb our noses at 'em. Maybe we'll cry. . . . But no hysterics, Ruth."

She kept the light on him for a long moment. Then: "Very well. Lead the way, please."



"There it is," Bill said. . . . "Millions, probably."

He went in, and continued directly to the stove. He knew of no way to proceed other than to be entirely matter of fact. He ~~aid~~ the hearth back and opened the door, so that the fire cast a glow on rafters and walls. "Better turn off the flashlight," he said, over his shoulder. "We've got to make it last." She did so, and stood by the bunk, watching him.

He took off his leather jacket and hung it on the wall. The room was pleasantly warm, the water boiling. He got down the battered saucepan, tin cups and can of tea. "You'd better brew it," he said. "I'll get in more wood." He went outside at once, leaving her standing there.

He took his time with the first load of wood. When he brought it

in, sparkling with frost, she had her coat off and the tea was steeping. He didn't look at her, but knew her glance was following him. When he came with the fourth load, and racked it on the growing tier against the wall, the tea was poured and four sandwiches were on the bunk, still wrapped in their waxed paper. There were also four chocolate bars.

He'd forgotten about the bars. They'd be worth more to her than sandwiches on the home-stretch.

"The tea's ready," she said.

She was standing in the shadow back of the stove. Only the front half of the cabin was illumined. He handed her one of the steaming cups and took his own place in front of the hearth, in the light, with the stove between them.

"Do we eat our sandwiches now?"

"No, we'll save them. One tomorrow, one a day after that."

THE tea was good. It was hot, heart-warming. They sipped slowly, looking at each other past the stove-pipe, while the wind whispered across the roof and the heater grinned redly in the shadow.

Again he groped his way. One thing was certain: the facts had to be established.

"I had hopes for Rocky until I saw the mine," he said. "The whole picture's fairly clear now, I think. Whitey wanted to bring you up here alone and eliminate you. It was the simplest way. But Rocky persuaded him to bring me into it—somebody who'd play ball with them—and have you sign off legally. That scheme failed, so Rocky's washed his hands of it all. His conscience is clear." He imitated Rocky's shrug, waving his cup. "He tried, didn't he?"

She said nothing, waiting. He couldn't read her expression in the shadow, but from her pose she was rigidly on guard. It was like talking to a stranger.

"So we're marooned here. We're on our own. Let's start from there." He took up the kettle. "Another?"

She shook her head and put her empty cup down on the back of the stove. He started to refill his own cup, then set it down and placed the kettle on the hearth.

"Okay, Ruth," he said. "We'll start further back. It isn't what we've got to face, but how we face it that counts. . . . We're up against it here. The odds are we won't make it. That isn't what's bothering you, is it?"

She broke her silence: "No. It's your attitude toward all this. It's offensive."

"Sorry. In what way?"

"You took me down to the glacier just now," she said, evenly. "It was quite impressive. You wanted to make

sure that I understood very thoroughly that we were done for, that there was no way out of this ghastly place."

He shook his head. "I was looking at the *only* way out, as a matter of fact. So we'd know where we stood."

"So we could make the best of it," she agreed. "You've a positive genius for that. . . . But there are limits, you know." She gestured about the cabin. "No furnishings. No privacy. No food to speak of. . . . The food won't matter for a day or two, of course. We had a marvelous breakfast at Prince Rupert, didn't we?"

"Yes," he agreed, watching her.

"So we'll be quite comfortable for a day or two. If it storms, what of it? You've anticipated that. It's good wood, isn't it?"

"Excellent," he said. "Well seasoned."

"We may be snowed in for days and days." She indicated the bunk. "There's only one sleeping-bag—a mere detail. It's undoubtedly big enough for two. When everything's so delightfully primitive like this, one musn't be squeamish, must one? As long as we can't help it, everything should be entirely chummy and cozy?"

"It happens," he said, "that better men and women than you and I have slept under the same blankets in the North—when they had to."

"Unmarried persons?"

"Cold persons," he said with grim amusement. "If it's cold enough, and there's one set of blankets, you crawl in or die."

"An example, I suppose, of the primitive urge to survive?"

"Among the more primitive types," he said, nodding. "Not *us*, of course. . . . Or no, Ruth," he said quietly. "I withdraw that. We've no time to quibble." He tilted his head, listening to the sweep of the wind across the roof. "I've done this backward. I should have told you in the beginning that you'll be holding down the fort here alone. You'll have all the privacy you wish—even to sleeping alone."

"Thank you," she said. "You're extremely thoughtful. And just where will you be?"

"On the way to the East Fork. I'm leaving in about ten minutes."

SHE smiled at him. He had not thought he would see a moment when her smile would hurt. "Really? I had the notion—you told me, in fact—that it was impossible afoot. One's stories change, don't they?"

"Our only chance now," he said, "is that it's possible. I'm taking the sleeping-bag with me. I wouldn't live through the first storm without it. You'll have to get along on the bunk here, with your coat and the fire. It won't be comfortable, but you'll survive—long enough. D'you mind?"

"Not at all. . . . If it becomes tedious, I'll have many pleasant memories to rely on. For example, Aunt Beth and Aunt Aggie—how much it *might* have meant to them if I just hadn't given you that letter to mail. Your letting me cry on your shoulder up there in the tunnel—a most gracious gesture. The charming hypocritical manner in which you let your eyes laugh when you said: 'Hi, Ruth!'"

"The referee must be blind," he said, between his teeth. "All those were below the belt."

"I beg your pardon?"

He shrugged. "If I make it, I'll send someone after you. Don't give up hope until the end of the second week, at least. I'll try to make it in one rush, but I may get snowed in somewhere."

"An heroic picture," she said. "I'm impressed no end."

"I'll leave the food here, the flashlight and the rock-hammer," Bill went on. "Use the rock-hammer to keep the water-hole open. Conserve your strength. Don't be frightened at night. Remember, there's nothing here to harm you. No prowling animals, no



men." He turned away abruptly, tightening his belt. "Well, I'll get in the rest of the wood."

When he came back with the first load, his anger and hurt had faded again. It was impossible to hold animosity toward her now. Life was too short—literally. . . . She was sitting on the edge of the bunk, staring unseeingly at the fire. Her eyes were dark and luminous. He couldn't tell whether it was her inner speculations or the glow from the hearth that warmed her cheeks. . . . Nor whether she seemed so poignantly beautiful because he was seeing her, in these minutes, for the last time.

He stacked the wood methodically and went out again. On his second trip, she said: "You're a remarkable person, Mr. Kennedy. I should be quite carried away by all this, except that I've seen it before. You have a quaint expression for it—running a bluff, isn't it?"

"There's plenty of matches up on the shelf," he said. "I'd keep the fire going, though, if it turns real cold."



"Easy, Ruth," Bill said gently. "Don't be afraid of me." "Sorry I'm so jumpy," she said. "Just—don't touch me."

not, the record stands approved as read."

She had her legs crossed, one elbow resting on her knee, her chin resting in her cupped hands. It was a graceful, comfortable pose.

"You know," she said, "I'm quite intrigued by this bluffing. Streak of the gambler in me, no doubt."

He nodded. "Flying up here proved that. The gamblers have a phrase for it—you shot the works."

"And lost?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Tell me something, then. Why have you acted like this? I mean, from the beginning? Because you've hated me all these years?"

"Oh, no," he said. "No. It was because I loved you."

She looked up at him quickly, her cheeks dimpling a little. "My word! . . . You'll say I invited that, I suppose?"

"It's the first rule of gambling," he said, smiling down at her. "Never bluff unless you're ready for a call. . . . Anything else?"

"One question occurs to me: How would you have acted if you'd hated me? . . . Never mind." She lifted her shoulders and looked back at the fire. "The going seems a bit rough. Let's get on with it. Play it out, you know."

"Time's on the wing," he agreed.

He stood there a moment longer, his fingers outspread to the heat, then turned to the bunk and adjusted the sleeping-bag and tarp in the pack-harness. He lashed it securely and hefted it. It made a light load.

He brought in the last load and stacked it up with grim satisfaction. She would know hunger and loneliness, but the cold of the barrens would never touch her. "Use the big chunks at night," he said. "They'll hold the fire while you sleep."

He used the cutting-edge of the rock-hammer, awkward though it was, to split a considerable pile of kindling.

When he was through, he placed the hammer on the shelf and looked about him. The water-bucket was half empty. He took it out, filled it and brought it back.

That was all; the chores were done. She was on her own now.

"It's turning cold, all right," he said, warming his hands. "Any questions, Ruth? Any errors or omissions? If

He crossed to the wall, took down his leather jacket and put it on. He put on his helmet, wincing a little as he adjusted the chin-strap. It irritated the bruise on his jaw. This reminded him of Red Schafer, of all the things, briefly glimpsed, that might have been—except for that ruinous moment in the alley. Good Lord, that was only eighteen hours ago!

He stood gloves in hand, and gave the cabin a final survey. The flashlight was on the bunk beside her, the rock-hammer on the shelf. The water-bucket was full, the wood split. He took up the pack, thrust his arms through the shoulder straps and shook himself, adjusting the load.

"Well, Ruth," he said, "this is it. I won't be seeing you again, whether I make it through or not. You understand that, and why."

"I should protest, no doubt." She looked up at him questioningly. "I should say that we've barely met, and 'must you hurry off?' Or what? . . . Sorry if I seem to fumble my cue."

"I'll lead with my chin once more," he said, smiling down at her. "The pride of the Kennedys *versus* the pride of the MacRaes. We've had our tea. You'll recall, though, that there was no lemon."

"You're leading up to something," she accused. "I hear it stirring in the bushes."

"Right. D'you mind if I kiss you good-by? . . . You'd rather not, perhaps?"

"I'd rather not. Sorry."

He inclined his head and drew on his gloves. "Okay. . . . It's been a pleasure to see you again. I'd thought of you often since Shawnigan. Too bad things broke the way they did." He gestured about the cabin. "Take care of yourself. Don't be afraid. Keep the fire going." *Just keep talking, Kennedy*, he thought. "Well," he said, "good-by."

"Good-by."

He opened the door, backed out, and closed it behind him.

THE swirling air smote him. It was bitterly cold. He plunged at once through the scrub timber, crunching through the frost-crystals. A dozen paces away, he halted, listening. He thought he had heard her calling his name.

But the cabin door remained closed, and no sound came from within its walls. Frozen branches creaked in the gloom about him. Far above, in the moonlit crags, the wind howled on.

He climbed the moraine and halted at the crest, winded from the heavy going. From this point the lake seemed more desolate than ever: shadowed at the left, but with the moonlight strengthening on the static ice and the lifeless western wall. He

made out the cabin in the timber, the sparks whipping from the chimney; those sparks came from the glowing fire, and she was watching that fire. He knew that that picture would remain with him always, sharply etched. *Good-by, Ruth*, he thought, turning.

He mounted, northwest, appraising the unfolding terrain. It became a vast snowfield whose upper edge ended at the base of a lofty cliff, and whose lower edge broke off into space. Far below—too far—was cloudlike timber. Far ahead, a crenelated ridge was black against the stars.

He started in that direction—it was the only way—picking his way carefully over the crusted snow, blinking in a fog of ice particles that quartered by from the north, riding the wind.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AFTER midnight by the clock, five hours and weary miles from Luna Lake, the storm and its attendant darkness made further progress impossible. The moon had been blotted out at the zenith, long since, and the western stars had faded as under a lowering curtain. The cold had a sullen, deadly quality now. First flurries of snow belching down from the heights had merged into a steady blast that seemed to scour the very rock underfoot.

Bill broke into a shuffling dog-trot on the last stretch, sprinting for shelter. Dead ahead, though he could no longer see it, was the ridge at which he had aimed since quitting the lake. It had grown, hour by hour, into a barrier that entirely choked the narrowing snowfield: a vast moraine caused by countless acres of rock that had crumbled and crashed from the sheer face of the mountain.

He made it to the shoulder-high fragments at its lower edge, and laboriously mounted around and over them, feeling his way. The force of the wind increased with each upward step; he could hear it screaming through hidden obstructions above. He had no notion of trying to cross the barrier tonight. Shelter was the thing. Somewhere above would be a cave or ledge, protected from wind and hurtling snow, where he could hole in until dawn.

He found it at the crest: a low niche roofed by arched debris, facing away from the wind. He knew it was the crest because the footing leveled off and began to fall away. Beyond and below was nothing but swirling blackness. Yet this exposed position had an advantage: if the storm held up, the scouring wind would permit no choking drifts here.

He backed into his cave like a badger, spread the tarp with stiffening

fingers and unrolled the sleeping-bag upon it. Turning half of the tarp back over the bag gave added protection. It was the most primitive of shelters, but by contrast to the forces rolling by in the blackness outside, it was a castle, no less. Hurriedly he took off his shoes and outer clothing, shook loose snow from them and stacked them about and over the foot of the bag. He was careful not to drag the slightest snow-particle with him when he crawled in, mindful of the oldest rule of the winter barrens: "Above all, keep your blankets dry."

It was a roomy bag, with double thicknesses of eiderdown and with a heavy waterproof casing. Rocky had bought the best. It smelled new and clean and was vastly comfortable. As he snuggled down, and the chill began to thaw slowly from his congealed face and aching muscles, Bill knew that he was safe for tonight, at least. Tomorrow might be a different story, but thus far, this far, he led in the race.

He cast up the balance, like a miser counting his gold. He was hungry, but though he had eaten only one meal that day—breakfast at Prince Rupert, more than twelve hours before—he was not too hungry to sleep. Part of his present wolfish craving was synthetic, rooted in the knowledge that there was no food. The real belt-tightening would begin tomorrow.

He was thirsty, but not uncomfortably so. Twice during that seemingly interminable haul along the snowfield, he had paused at shallow grooves and hacked down through the ice with his pocket knife, and found summer seepages still trickling sluggishly there. Short days hence, not a drop of water would be stirring along these frozen slopes.

But he would have to get down to the protection of the timber tomorrow—the next day at the latest—or the race would be lost. There was no use blinding himself to one grim fact: the iron grip of winter was closing on the Rockies. The present blast might be a mere advance guard of the forces slumbering in the peaks. It might blow over before morning. But from this time on, nothing that moved or breathed could hope to live long or travel far in these bitter, wind-scoured heights.

As he pulled the flap of the bag down more snugly about his head, some loose objects slithered about his shoulders. He felt for them in the darkness, found them and identified them at once by their contour and the texture that covered them: four chocolate bars.

He lay for a moment warm and still, deaf to the roar of the wind and the tiny pattering of ice particles settling in the cave. That Ruth had surreptitiously thrust these bars into the

*Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley*



*"D'you mind if I kiss
you good-by?" Bill
asked. "I'd rather not.
Sorry," Ruth replied.*

rolled sleeping-bag was touching enough. In calories, energy food, she had given him more than half her meager store—close to the ultimate in unselfish gestures.

But it went farther than that. As he thought back over that last time—sequence in the cabin,—he had already lived them a score of times in memory,—it became plain that she could only have done it while he was getting in the last of the wood. After they'd had their tea. *Before* she had said: "You have a quaint phrase for all this—running a bluff, isn't it?" . . . Therefore she had known in her heart that it was no bluff.

How much more, the acceptance of what other truths, had been hidden under her smiling poise?

He would never know; and it was useless, dangerous, even to speculate on it now. That she had projected her personality across the long miles from Luna Lake—warmly, vividly—merely reaffirmed that that phase of life had been closed. She and those moments were gone. The snowfield could not again be crossed.

He decided to eat two of the bars now, two tomorrow night. The first sustained, stamina-devouring haul was

what counted in this marathon. The moment his resistance dwindled, he was defenseless against the cold. Bodily heat, the mere ability to keep warm, was the essential factor until he reached the timber.

He ate two bars, making each morsel last, knowing he would never again taste food so sweet. . . .

He awoke to a clear and brilliant dawn. When he first peered out and saw the cloudless sky, a surge of hope dulled the mounting ache of his hunger. The wind still howled on a sustained, desolate note, but the storm had temporarily blown over. No great snowfall had occurred, from the look of the drifts lodged among the rocks.

He crawled out and dressed quickly in the numbing cold. Frost from his breath was thick on the flap of his



The last stretch along the ledge was bad. The combination of icy footing and savage wind forced Bill to inch from hand-hold to hand-hold, his body pressed against the living rock. Those were nightmare moments.

sleeping-bag. His shoes were like concrete, his leather jacket white and crackling. Fast as he moved, he was thoroughly chilled by the time he got his equipment rolled.

Out in the open, in the full force of the wind that swept the crest, the cold was compounded and deadly. His durable clothing seemed to thin moment by moment. As he took in the overpowering vista northward, where peaks loomed beyond massive peaks as far as the eye could see, his synthetic hope faded. He had probably come twelve miles the night before—slipping and balancing, wasting precious stamina detouring around obstructions that could easily have been avoided by day. What was that meager gain compared to the vast distances ahead?

In the immediate foreground was rougher going. The snowfield, only temporarily blocked by this bristling drift, narrowed swiftly under the cliff. It became a sloping shelf; and finally, as the lower and upper precipices merged, a mere whitened ledge that seemed to peter out on the sheer face of the wall.

And yet, as his eye followed that thin line to the end, he saw that the ledge didn't actually disappear, but rounded the last mighty corner and so out of sight. That point was three or four miles away, though it seemed much closer. Something of promise might be beyond. There *had* to be.

Certainly he couldn't stand here speculating. If there was a way, it could only lie ahead.

THE last stretch along the ledge, two hours later, was bad. The ledge itself was broad enough, and almost level; but the combination of icy footing and savage gusts of wind forced him to inch from hand-hold to hand-hold, his body pressed against the living rock. Those were nightmare moments. Beyond the edge—and a single misstep would send him hurtling over it—was nothing but space.

He made it to the corner and crept around it doggedly. The force of the wind eased a little as the wall veered farther and farther to the north. Otherwise he would have had to halt, because the ledge was crumbling. The final break was just ahead. He made it, and came at once to comparative safety: a huge crevasse, but a fault, a cleavage across the rock strata. It pierced into the cliff to a depth of twelve feet or more, its interior choked with rubble and ice. At the point where he stood was a considerable cave, dry of floor and protected from the wind. The gash narrowed rapidly above, and its course downward was like a bristling, rough-hewn chimney.

He started down, after a momentary breather. He didn't permit himself to

hope, but there was a chance that this crack extended all the way down to the timber. At least it should reach to the first giant step. From there, some other feasible route down was probable. In any event, why climb from this altitude to higher, bleaker barrens?

That decision forced a supreme test of his pet theory: a gambler must be prepared to lose. . . . What he lost here was eleven stamina-devouring hours: four on the terrific descent, seven on the even more ghastly return haul—an approximate one-fourth of what he figured to be his life-expectancy in terms of starvation, exhaustion and cold. The *second* one-fourth.

The impact of it—the realization that he had guessed wrong—came at dusk, three thousand feet below. As he came to the end of the crevasse, and braced himself there, knees weak and every muscle in his body trembling, his reason refused at first to accept a verdict plain to the eye: having descended this far, at such cost, he had missed the timber by a scant hundred feet.

Yet there it was, and no frantic scanning of the bleached wall below could change it. The whole base of the cliff had crumbled away here, crevasse and all. Stunted spruce bristled from the lower edge of the debris—so close that he could see each snow-whitened twig in the fading light. Summer seepages rushing down this crevasse during the centuries had worn the face of that last drop clean, rounding and smoothing out all possible hand-holds. The space between him and the timber might as well be the gulf between stars.

He had to go back. He faced that conclusion after heartsick moments during which his courage was backed into its corner, groggy and punch-drunk, ready for the count. He often wondered afterward what he would have done at that point except for thoughts of Ruth. For himself it would have been easy enough. His hands were already numbing dangerously, his ankles paralyzing in their cramped position. Merely relax and let go. . . . The hell with it! The mountain had him licked.

But in the end, having faced it, and having thought of Ruth and the remaining outside, remotest chance, he started back.

Night overtook him within the hour; and because the moon was hidden by the bulk of the mountain, only the vaguest of reflected light shone in the crack. Through five hours of darkness, feeling for each hand-hold, he climbed and rested and inched stubbornly on, like a mole burrowing toward light. At the end he was fighting for sufficient strength merely to lift

his weight from one projection to the next. The last thirty feet, with the goal in sight, seemed just thirty feet too far.

He made it, got his elbows on the floor of the cave, rested there, then inched his body up. He turned over on his side and lay there, utterly spent. It was near midnight. He was back where he had started from just after noon.

ONE chore was still to be done: inch back into the cave, as far as possible from the swirling air-currents, unroll and crawl in. He got out of his pack, and came up to hand and knee and crawled back into the darkness, back against the living rock. He unrolled the bag, laid it out, got it ready. Then he crawled to his right, toward an ice-formation he had seen at noon. It was a seepage that had created great icicles joining roof to floor. He struck a match to survey it, then got out his knife and hacked through the central column.

He opened up a thin, trickling vein, caught it in his cupped hands and drank deeply. The trickle would be sealed again by morning. Ice seemed to congeal on his fingers, and he dried them clumsily on his handkerchief. He knew that he was at dangerously low ebb. Even his tremendous physical exertion hadn't entirely fought off the encroachment of the cold.

And yet, momentarily refreshed, and in the grip of a blind, futile rage at the calamity that had overhauled him, he squatted for a moment, looking up through frost-rimmed eyes at the crevasse overhead. One look up there might tell tomorrow's story, the final story. If the crevasse was choked up above, it could easily be that he could afford to sleep late in the morning. . . .

He crawled up, feeling lighter without the meager bulk of his pack, and found that the angle of the crevasse changed a little for the better. He could actually walk in a stooped position, hands on knees, and another dim corner loomed far ahead. He shambled toward it, and after long moments came to it and peered upward.

He could only make out silhouettes in the darkness up there, but it didn't look bad. The crevasse seemed to be widening as it mounted. He tried to lash himself to the effort of making it to one more corner, but just couldn't do it. He still had to make it back to the sleeping-bag. . . . Better wait till morning. It was better to have hope to feed on, at that.

He went back, more slowly, his knees buckling. His legs seemed to be made of rubber, and his arms were stiff. He rested often, and had to pause for a long time before negotiating the last drop to the floor of the

cave. He had to remember where each hand-hold was. He had to do everything in slow motion. Too bad to slip and fall here. . . .

He made it to the floor and fell there. He turned on his side, unbuttoned his jacket, and tried to unlace his boots. His fingers had no feeling in them, and he thrust his hands inside his jacket and inside his shirt, under his clamped arms. As he lay there, eyes closed, he worked his chin out of the strap and got his helmet loose. The sleeping-bag was less than six feet away in the darkness. The wind swirled in the cave, and the moan of it was a long fanfare in the crevasse above. *Hang on*, he thought, teeth clenched. *You'll make it yet.*

His fingers had a faint touch of life. He identified the proper thong in his boot-lace and pulled the bow-knot free. With his thumbs he loosened both laces and with patient effort got his belt unbuckled.

Then he crawled toward the bag and found its edge. He rose to his knees to get his jacket off and spread it clumsily over the foot of the bag. . . . It seemed bulkier than before, as though some other covering were outspread there. He felt of the bag, and it was bulging under his hand.

He got out a match but couldn't hold it, at first. Then he clamped it between the first two fingers, between the knuckles, and struck it on the rock overhead. It flared momentarily, lighting up the cave. All registered upon him in a photographic impression.

A durable coat was outspread over the end of the bag, its skirts ragged and ice-incrusted. Other trail-worn objects were tucked in against the wall; and out in the clear stood a pair of high-laced shoes. They were sturdy shoes, scarred but durable still, much smaller than his own.

He clawed back the flap of the sleeping-bag. Ruth was lying there, facing toward him, her eyes closed and her head pillowed on her arm. Her hair lay in tousled, dark masses, pushed back from her forehead. She was breathing, in a slow, shuddering way. Ice particles in her delicate eyebrows and long lashes were just melting. They were like tiny tears trickling down her cheeks. . . .

Then the light went out, and darkness swooped into the cave.

Suddenly he was afraid. She had come all the way from Luna Lake in one haul. She had crawled the last stretch. "Ruth!" He lowered to an elbow beside her. "*Ruth!*"

She was still conscious. She said haltingly, a statement of fact rather than a question: "It's you, isn't it—Bill. . . . Sorry to move in—like this." Each breath was inhaled with a shuddering sigh. "Get in quickly—please. I'm sure you're—quite frozen."

He was; and it was with wooden, clumsy movements that he presently inched in beside her. She held the covers away, making room. He kept his back to her, trying not to press against her, fearful even in his own complete exhaustion of alarming her.

But she drew him close to her, feebly helped him tuck the covers in, helped him draw the flap down over their heads.

"There," she said. "There." Her arm crept about him and held him close. She was like a child lately lost in the black forest, but come at last to sanctuary. Her face was pressed against his back, and all her chilled body was huddled against him. "Now—the mountain's behind me. You're—between me and the edge. Don't let me—fall off, Bill."

"Easy," he soothed. "You're perfectly safe now. Just relax. Quiet."

"But I've got to tell you—why I came. You m-mustn't scold me."

"I won't. You're here. Does it matter why? . . . It's all right, Ruth."

She clung to him, and he knew she was crying; that she had until now, all the long way, held back her tears. "I gave up hope—hours and hours ago. My only chance was that you'd go d-down the fault, and I might catch you here. I *had* to. . . . Then I found the bag here, and I thought—I was afraid—that you'd g-given up." Her arm tightened about him; she was sobbing outright. "Bill, I—I'm glad you're safe. Sorry I'm—such a baby!"

There's two of us, he thought. Ice—or something—was melting in his own tightly-closed eyes. "Rest now!"

As warmth crept slowly, grudgingly, into their chill cocoon, she was seized by a violent trembling. He said: "It's all right. You're just thawing out. Wait till I start shaking."

She was relaxed when his shuddering began. When it passed, she still lay inert, breathing regularly. Though she twitched at intervals, cried out, reliving in dreams certain nameless moments at the lake, on the snowfields and the screaming ledge, she slept.

He too yielded quickly to complete exhaustion. It blotted out hunger, worry, even the capacity for logical thought. He carried with him into a dreamless coma the sound of the wind sweeping across the crevasse. Death was strumming a lonely harp in the night. But all of life that was true and treasured, was safe and close.

The final installment of this story will appear in our forthcoming July issue.

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

This type of crossword puzzle is designed to present an exercise for your imagination rather than a test of your vocabulary. In

other words, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram, the enigma,

the hidden word and—for variety to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 77.)

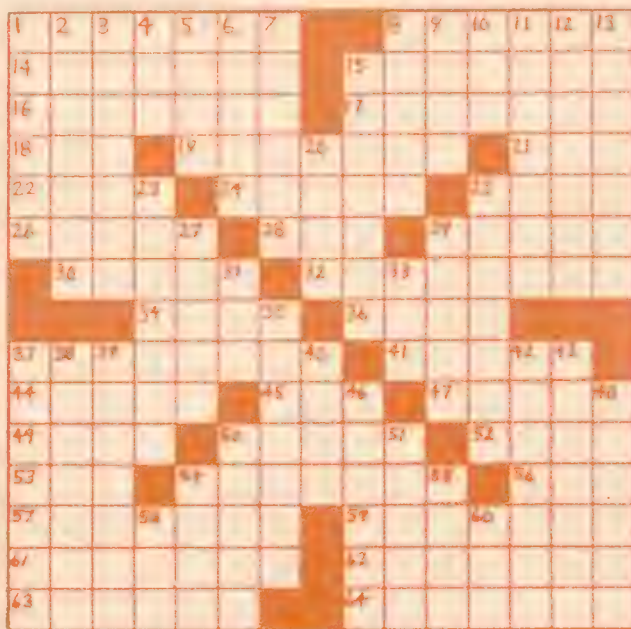
ACROSS

- 1 Hide and seek before a network
- 8 Groups of a thousand donkeys?
- 14 Put on the robe in the end
- 15 Petain's too confused to be wise
- 16 Best bud, though bruised
- 17 Repeat, if you make it P
- 18 Measure of receding time
- 19 Sped around the Jap but got cut off
- 21 *Chic* more than describes her
- 22 All meat without ale
- 24 Helplessly shell out for these appeals
- 25 We'll come to our end in the rain
- 26 Effect penetration without a point
- 28 Destined to begin a fight
- 29 Amens are undoubtedly said here
- 30 Novices always mix up a story
- 32 It's sweets to return, even under pressure
- 34 Poe's a writer of fictitious tales
- 36 Place in the East
- 37 After beginning on TNT, Dad makes asphalt
- 41 Severe rear
- 44 Therefore and so forth would be hereafter
- 45 Led to the hidden child
- 47 The boat returns to the ponds
- 49 Different from Chelsea
- 50 Five is, or makes a brim
- 52 Unspecified part of Moses
- 53 Portuguese money
- 54 Cows get a twitch, causing motion

- 56 "A ——— for him who frets! It is not raining rain to me . . ."
- 57 New side, revealed when put on end
- 59 Drawing is given O.K.
- 61 Bathed where it is deepest
- 62 I'm eaten in a variety show
- 63 Rate of a steamship in chopped-up seas
- 64 D.D.S. glee-tully pounded

DOWN

- 1 Disguises a means of opening the cave
- 2 A newcomer gets messed-up near TNT
- 3 It's a mean trick to cry about a lute arrangement
- 4 Steal from your little brother?
- 5 Flows back and retires
- 6 The least of the three bears
- 7 Edward perished in the whirlpool
- 8 Teddy Roosevelt left matters for his associates
- 9 Followed by a change in a biped
- 10 I know you, mister, without having met
- 11 Quarters for sons who follow the sea
- 12 Hidden, thus enabled to show zeal
- 13 Guided by an ox?
- 15 Steps up around pi in bits
- 20 The mark of addition
- 23 Publius T. Afer, Roman dramatist
- 25 Light shades must be classed as staples



- 27 Muddled girl is an I-sore
- 29 Inmates find food
- 31 When ould, it's Ireland
- 33 ——— publicae
- 35 Covered with patina, seems painted
- 37 Marie : Maria : : Antoinette : x
- 38 Lent, but yields when surrounded by legal matters
- 39 Dissident (in the inner portion)
- 40 Odes in quantity
- 42 Shingles or slate; e.g., from the foregoing
- 43 One named after me in a Michigan city
- 46 Music bath charms—even motets
- 48 Plugged, but finally was egged on
- 50 They grasp at bad habits, I hear
- 51 Compete for a Persian coin (about a nickel)
- 54 Skip around in your skins
- 55 Shelter at night
- 58 Extended, we are short
- 60 Offspring of the German kind

What Do You Think?

A Readers' Forum

AT EIGHTEEN

I AM proud and happy to be able to say that I am a soldier in the United States Army at the supposedly tender age of eighteen. A few short weeks ago I dreamed of going to college, of planning a serene life, of making my folks safe and secure; but today I'm a hiking trainee in Uncle Sam's fighting Coast Artillery Corps, and r'aring to go!

The factors causing this upheaval dig deep into mankind's soul, and defy anyone to explain. The matrix of a Hitler or a Mussolini lies in the hands of Satan himself, and I shall include them in the same category as the result they have caused—briefly, as part of the evil and in no way good, nor worthy of discussion.

Rather I want to tell you of the philosophical outlook that I myself have formulated; an outlook that grew while I lay awake in my tent at night thinking. At the same time I thought of home, so that there was an intermingling. As I lay awake I thought:

Here you are, a young man just about to begin his own life, when you have had to give it all up and take up a new life, as a soldier. You have to forget the pleasures of your civilian life, and have had to perform tasks below the level of accepted custom. You did not start this war. Oh, yes, you've read of the hatred and torture, but Danzig and Kunming were to you just names, and you forgot them as soon as you put the paper down. People around you argued, some heatedly, but you blissfully ignored them all and went your way.

You remember one day, though. You returned from the football game with Elaine, to find that your world had been burnt down. Your mother was weeping, your father staring incredulously (to think it would happen again, after what Mr. Wilson and Black Jack told us!); and your little sister bewildered by it all, was sobbing in sympathy with your mother. America, your America, was at war! You had plunged into a new world. The storybook faded, and reality took its grim shape; for Kisy, your brother, was with the Marine Corps at Pearl

Harbor on this very day. . . . Oh, God, no!

All night and most of the next day you sat up, thinking confused thoughts and listening to confused reports. You and America were awakening—awakening from a sleep that had indirectly caused the death of five million men! The days passed slowly until finally there was a ring on your doorbell. You opened the door, received a telegram from Rappy, your club president and personal pal. You tore the message open, with the family all around you. You read something, something that will haunt you until your end: "*The Navy Department regrets to inform you that your son, Kismuth, was killed in action at Pearl Harbor on December 7th.*" Your mother's sobs beat a crescendo of hatred toward these murderers in your heart, a hatred that burns today! The war had come home to one house in America.

Next day you heard of how the Marines threw rocks at the Japs, when ammunition was lacking. Kisy had thrown his, no doubt. . . . Rest in peace, brother!

A year passed, and there you stood, at the same station, about to leave. You kissed your mother, shook hands

with a father who could not pull himself together, and were on your way. It was the Coast Artillery Corps. No Marines, but tough anyway.

Then you were alone in the Virginia night again; alone and thinking. Taps sounded. Taps for Kisy and his buddies. Taps to renew your faith; and then you prayed, and praying said:

"Thank God, I'm an American. I'm off to fight for freedom like my father before me, like my brother a short while ago. Thank God I'm alive to do this! I'm not a strutting peacock nor a bossing tyrant. I'm humble in the memory of our brave dead, and humble in the thought of my God. I shall fight and die, if need be, so that America may live. Please God, bless our cause, and give me the power to do for it as I would."

Taps ended. Lingering thoughts of America's great future rose before me. Bigotry, intolerance, hypocrisy were gone. Science and reason had molded a great free and healthy America. Whether I am there or not matters little, so long as it shall be.

That is what I am fighting for. Germany, Japan and Italy must be shown the light—the light of freedom and democracy leading mankind nearer toward the way of the Creator.

Pvt. Martin Blauer,
Fort Eustis, Va.

What Do You Think?

These are anxious days for all of us. We are united solidly in the war effort; yet otherwise we are a vastly diverse nation; and no two of us have just the same personal problems.

Most of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his wartime dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do You Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE BOYS LEFT BEHIND

YEARS ago when I was a young girl (World War I), I was deeply shocked one morning to wake up and find the drugstore of the little town where I was visiting, painted a mustard yellow. The son of the owner of that store had not volunteered for service in the Army quickly enough to suit the population of that little settlement—and in the night a delegation had arrived with the paint-buckets and brushes and had proceeded to decorate the store the color which they thought this boy was inside!

In eighteen months the boy was dead of tuberculosis—he had been turned down by the draft board and told to rest and take treatment for the disease. However, he was his father's pharmacist; and as all the others had

gone to war he remained at his post filling prescriptions for the very people who hated him and painted him yellow. . . . That week I made up my mind I would never as long as I live make unwise remarks, or let my tongue wag in vicious circles—knowing that things may not be what they seem on the surface.

I thought a lot of other people would learn that lesson—they had just as much chance as I. But now in this other terrible war that is in our hearts and our thoughts, I see signs of it again—this intolerance, this wild desire to talk, even though the talker may not be sure of the truth of the things he says; and I am wondering if there isn't some swift sure way to stop it.

In the town where we live now they gave a dinner to our draft board the other night, to show them that we appreciate the way they have handled our boys—over a thousand young men out of this tiny district, the best that this part of the State can produce. So many boys have joined up on their own hook that the board has almost no eighteen-year-olds to take. Our Legion clubhouse has an honor roll so big they have the front of the building covered and the sides are going to have to be used to put all their names there.

For that very reason the boys that are still left behind are sneered at, talked about, yelled at on the street. I am asking you readers as human beings to be tolerant with the boys who are still walking the streets; ten chances to one, you don't know why they are still there. I know a boy who was hurt in a motorcycle accident, receiving injuries that bar him from the service of his country. I know another boy who has a rupture, still another who fainted away on the parade ground and had to be sent home. They are all great big huskies who look as if they could do anything! That these boys would really like to go is the pitiful part of it. Three times now on the street I have heard women gossiping together, and the song was the same every time: "How come they didn't take that good-for-nothing Harold Brown—his job isn't so important!" How did she know it wasn't? Perhaps that boy has had five years of Math, and the plants are begging for young engineers just out of school with all the new methods. Somebody that's skilled has to stay at home and make shells, and design furnaces to make the steel for the shells. The methods of even two years ago are out of date. Women can make shells, it's true; but how many good women engineers do you know? Before you shoot off your mouth again, count ten—and let your draft-board alone. Most of them are pretty fair and they know the innermost secrets of these boys'

lives. They want to work unhampered—how about letting them?

Mrs. Wm. Francis Stevens, Sr.,
Ohio.

DOLLAR DAZE.

THE English poet Wordsworth once wrote:

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:*

I've been doing a lot of thinking along that line for the past five years and today my thoughts seem to be focused more intensely upon that quotation by the confusion resulting from the war period we are now living through.

It won't be long before I'll be in this melee—barely missed the last one. My own welfare is but of small concern to me personally; and honestly, I have a private yearning to get into the scrap.

The thing that worries me now is what sort of a world will my two boys and my daughter have to live in after the smoke rolls away. It seems to me that most of my life has been spent in a sort of a dollar daze. Prosperity and quick money have been lingering around the corner as far back as I can remember. Then came a depression, and a wholesale reorganization of social economy.

Through it all the theory of individual effort has been forgotten. The politician promises Utopia, the unions to share the wealth; and Big Business finds itself behind the eight ball.

Our national economy is in hock, and was before this war started. No one organization or any group of organizations is going to restore it. Each little individual who comprises the citizenry of this nation is going to pay his part of that bill, and should do it without fanfare.

Now comes the question: When my sons and their sons have done their part, are they going to be permitted each to follow his natural bent as their father and grandfathers have done, or are they going to be strait-jacketed and herded through a social dipping vat designed for them by bureaucratic barons or social demagogues?

As a probation officer I have found that the meanest and most cantankerous people I have to work with are the ones who have had their thinking done for them over a long period of time by some relief agency. Some of them come around on their own when they are jolted into figuring out their own destiny; but many of them will remain liabilities.

For America to remain a true democracy, it must continue to respond to individual initiative as it has always

done. The ideologies of the old world will no more fit the needs of tomorrow's American than snowshoes will fit a June bug. The home of tomorrow's American must remain his castle, and his mind his own.

All wars, regardless of how they start, wind up in some manner of social reform. The adjustment to these reforms begets another war—thus civilization seems to advance. That America must become involved in these wars seems inevitable; but at least we can keep a level head after it's over with.

Capital and Labor should always be permitted to fight out their respective disputes in the open; but neither group should be permitted to fix the standards of living for the countless millions of Americans in between; and our executive, judicial, and legislative government should never become so dominated by either group that the Constitution of the United States is submerged to its interests.

It is true that as a nation we can no longer live alone. "The world is too much with us." But in spite of that fact we don't have to bring the world into the bedroom with us when we retire. The tramp at the back door has no more right to the comforts of our living-room than has the prince at the front door to the bounty of our kitchen. They can both be heard and if their requests are reasonable we should, in a sense of fair play, do the best we can by each of them. But when either of them becomes a nuisance, we should be in a position to expel them.

Water will always seek its own level. It is only when it is dammed up that it becomes a menace. I have been permitted to seek my own level, and I hope that my sons and everyone's sons will have the same privilege. I do not want to go to bed with a Russian complex at night or wake up the next morning with a Frenchman's dream.

Individual likes and dislikes are the inalienable rights of citizenship that the next generation should inherit from the one that has gone on before.

To collaborate with the so-called democracies of the world is proper in furthering the interests of man. But to conspire with any other nation to foist its interpretation of government upon a free people is malicious. I hope that American minds may be permitted to remain open. I refuse to believe that it shall ever be otherwise, but the trend away from individualism is foreboding. . . .

My job, as I see it, is to do the best I can with the job I have at hand. I must hoe my own row with my own implements and teach my sons to do the same. I shall encourage them to do a little better job than the other fellow does, so they may learn to profit

from a little extra effort. When the war is done, I'd like to be able to spend my evenings in the peace of my own home rather than be compelled to do something my heart is not in.

I have faith in America and in American people, for I am one of them. Their batting average is high because they play fair and swing hard.

But the fact remains: The world is too much with us, late and soon... Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers. Let's think awhile.

*T. C. McVea,
Alabama.*

ALL NEIGHBORS TODAY

WE are constantly informed that individual initiative and private enterprise are our life-blood. This country, its industries and farms, its schools and churches, its high standard of living, wide acceptance of political freedom, free press and speech, we are told, were developed by and exists solely by virtue of private enterprise.

I have no objection to this teaching, so far as it goes. But it is only part of the story. America as it exists today is mainly the product of coöperative activity and struggle, and the accumulated experience and effort of millions of people. Each new generation has built new additions to the structure left by those who have passed. When we analyze society from the historical view, all the talk about individuals climbing to great heights, and accumulating great fortunes by virtue of their own power, fades into insignificance before the contributions made by the masses by their combined coöperative efforts.

Today the term "private enterprise" is being used to mean something entirely different from the concept held by the average citizen. It is being used as a sacred cow by demagogic politicians, before which all must worship, or be accused of advocating a "communistic planned economy" and importing foreign *isms* with the intent of destroying American business.

The American tradition is not fundamentally one of individual initiative and private enterprise. Certainly our forefathers had plenty of individual initiative, but this did not keep them from working together, and their main enterprises were not private. Many of the houses built on the frontier were not built by individuals, and they were not private enterprises. The people got together, and by coöperative effort hoisted the heavy logs into place. Hog-killings and corn-huskings were always coöperative enterprises. Sickness brought the people together to help, and they often went so far as to plant and cultivate, or harvest the crops of the unfortunate. Our fathers

banded themselves together in wagon-trains to cross the plains; and when an attack was made by hostile Indians, each did not go his own way declaring that he was big enough to take care of himself. Instead they formed a fort with their covered wagons, and fought side by side. That is our tradition.

Times have changed, and we are all neighbors today. And this modern America has not come about through the doings of great individuals. No railroad was laid across the country by any individual. Thousands of men, working and living together, cleared the forests, graded the roadbed, laid the rails and ties which today link this country together.

Today, when a bomber plane rolls off the line, it is not the product of individual initiative or private enterprise. Thousands of men, engineers, designers, mechanics, metal and assembly-line workers, have welded their initiative and enterprise into one coöperative effort to render unto Hitler one more wagonload of destruction. A whole generation of scientists, engineers and craftsmen, including thousands of pilots, have been building and testing our planes in practice.

Likewise, the mechanism of our society is built and tested by thousands of thousands of hands and minds. Coöperative brotherhood, and the initiative of the masses is our greatest tradition and the source of our power. It is time we start teaching our children to reward their fellow-man, not by what they exact from society by greedy fingers and long knives, but by what they give to it. One man, working or thinking alone, without contact with his contemporaries and predecessors, never did anything worthwhile.

*Horace Bryan,
Arkansas.*

NEVER A BAD, SAD OR BLUE DAY

MY grandfather entered the United States in 1835. Having heard that war existed between Texas and Mexico, he joined Sam Houston's army. That is the reason our family has lived in the great Southwest. I find myself thinking in terms of wide spaces, fearless independence, individual self-sufficiency.

I grew up with little money, but with no thought of being poor. What we needed, we made or did without. If a neighbor had it, we borrowed. What a neighbor wanted, we lent.

People lived in dugouts, sod shanties, or log cabins. Cattle and horses wintered in cañons. The idea of fear, either of sickness, poverty, accidents or enemies, never entered my mind. With wild life plentiful, hogs in the forests, and cattle on the prairies, none ever thought of food being scarce.

My psychology has not changed with changing conditions. Although wild life has disappeared, cattle are corralled and hogs impounded, yet America has never come near the rough edge of starvation. Even during the lowest trough of our post-war depression, numerous men and women have declared they could find bread and work when and where they cared to meet conditions.

Personally, I have never been hungry, nor yet accumulated wealth. Never had a bad, sad or blue day. While some claim to have come up the hard way, others with silver spoons, I have come the happy way, contented and independent, believing the sun will rise each morning, and that stars will shine at night.

So far as I am concerned, times have always been good. We will win this war, after which times will be good again.

All of us have sons, daughters, nephews, or other relatives in the armed forces today. I expect mine to return. They did not go to die, but to win the war. It would be poor philosophy to sit with head between knees waiting for a dark message from the War Department. I expect my loved ones to return with badges on their lapels and figurative scalps to their belts.

The aftermath of the war may be unpleasant: high taxes, worn shoes, thinner slices of bread, more patches. Yet potatoes are always plentiful, corn abundant, sunshine inevitable. Should the hens stop laying, we eat the hens. When the spring runs dry, we dig wells. . . .

This should be the last war. Allied leaders could make a lasting peace provided they think in universal terms rather than in national selfishness. But whatever the peace terms, internationalism has so forced itself upon the peoples of the earth as to give humanity a new philosophy. Yesterday is gone forever. A better day is dawning.

When this war is over, I shall help pay the bills without complaint; when and if our country again is forced into conflict, I will do my part.

America has always had a sufficiency of essentials; I see no reason why the flow should cease. I think the happiest life-condition is that splendid medium between indolence asleep at his post, and foolish ambition snapping nerves or disrupting heart-valves.

When this war has been won, opportunity will be given to build a new world upon the wrecks of past civilizations. My opinion is that the new post-war world will be the most fraternal, the most successful, happiest, and best all-round environment since man came into possession of the earth.

*Walter Douglass,
Oklahoma.*



FLOATING *down the*

*Hi-o, away we go,
Floating down the river on the O-hi-o.*

THE high, rich tenor voice of the boatman stopped abruptly; and with the other four men on the port side of the keelboat, he ran forward to the prow, set his pole, and bent his muscles to the task of propelling the craft on upstream.

Young Tom Baker, sitting on the end of one of the docks stretching out into the river, watched the progress of the boat. The steersman turned it in toward the shore, and the boatman started singing again.

Tom got to his feet. "You're not floating down the river, and this aint the O-hi-o," he shouted. "It's the Monongahela." He stuttered a little over that last word, but he got it out correctly, and felt proud of himself.

The boatman stopped singing, and raising his head, looked at him and grinned in a friendly fashion. "Sure about that, sonny?"

Tom pointed downstream. "This river aint the O-hi-o until it gets around the bend."

"Right he is, Hunt," said one of the other boatmen.

The man called Hunt nodded his head gravely: "Thanks very much, sonny. Guess maybe I was wrong."

The keelboat, poled into a position near the landing, was made fast with ropes, and Tom Baker looked it over curiously. He had seen many of them on the river, but this was the first one he had been able to examine closely. Most of them went farther upstream before docking.

It was a strange-looking craft, long and narrow, and it carried a mast and sail. On either side of the cabin, running-boards extended around the boat from prow to stern. Along its bottom, he knew from something his father had said, there was a four-inch timber, substantial and heavy and well able to withstand the shock of a collision with a snag or a submerged rock. Going downstream, one steersman and two men at broad sweeps could navigate the boat. But coming upstream, from six to eight men were needed, half working on each side. They would set their poles near the head of the boat and push it forward, walking

back along the running-boards. Then hurrying to the front again, they would repeat the process.

"Well, sonny," asked a voice. "Like to be a boatman?"

Tom Baker stared up at the man who had asked that question. It was the fellow who had been singing. He was tall and bronzed and clean-shaven. He was clothed as most other boatmen, in a red flannel shirt covered by a loose blue jerkin. His trousers were of coarse brown linsey-woolsey.

"Don't know about boating," said Tom judiciously. "Think maybe I'd rather fight Indians."

The man nodded. "How old are you, son?"

"I was born in 1780."

"This is '92. That makes you twelve, huh?"

"Yes sir, almost thirteen."

From the shore a voice called suddenly: "Tom! Tom, come here!"

Tom swung around. His sister Catherine was standing at the end of the pier. He couldn't see her face, but he could imagine how stern she looked. She had warned him, time and again, against talking to strangers.



Where blast-furnaces now redden the night sky, keelboat men once fought off Indians and river pirates.

O-HI-O

by *Philip Ketchum*

"I guess, Mister," he said to the boatman, "that maybe I'd better go."

"Tom! At once!" called his sister's voice.

The boatman grinned. "I reckon you better run along, son."

Tom Baker turned around and walked back to where his sister was waiting.

For a moment the boatman watched them; then raising his eyes, he looked beyond them to the town of Pittsburgh. It wasn't much of a town. Altogether there couldn't have been more than a hundred square log houses on that triangle of land made by the junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers. Yet the place was teeming with life. Almost daily, he knew, Conestoga wagons arrived overland from Philadelphia bringing new emigrants. And almost daily some family would finish the construction of a flat-bottomed boat with side walls for protection against the Indians, and would start their journey down the Ohio toward the rich farmlands of the wilderness.

A slow smile worked its way into Hunt's face. There were only a hun-

dred cabins here now, but he could recall the time when there had been scarcely a dozen. He had seen Pittsburgh grow up from almost nothing and he had had his part in it—a boatman's part, but it was the boatmen who were building the town. It was the highway down the river and the opening lines of trade that had made possible this city, and that were opening a way to a new empire in the West.

HUNT'S people were already settled in Cincinnati, and some day he would find a place there too. But not yet—not while the call of the river was so strong in his blood. . . .

The men from the keelboat climbed to the dock, and several of them gathered around him.

"Think Kendall will be here, Joe?" one of them asked.

A somber expression darkened Joe Hunt's face. "I hope he is," he said flatly.

The man who had asked the question frowned, then said, hesitantly: "I'd go easy, Joe, if I were you. Kendall's pretty well thought of here in Pittsburgh. You don't have a shred

of proof that he was with the river pirates."

Hunt shrugged. "I saw him. That's all the proof I want. I'll meet you tonight at the Blue Boar Tavern."

He walked forward then, down the pier and past the girl and boy who were standing a few yards away. The girl's back was toward him. "All boatmen are rowdies," she was saying severely. "I've told you to stay away from them, Tom, and I mean it."

Hunt grinned. He stopped and nodded. "You're right, ma'am—rowdies an' drunks. We're no account at all."

The girl whirled around, a deep flush of color sweeping up into her cheeks. She bit her lips.

Hunt touched his hat and moved on. Coming toward him he saw Zadak Cramer, the Pittsburgh printer, whose *Navigator* was the guidebook and bible of all men who traveled down the Ohio.

"Hello, Cramer," he greeted.

Cramer reached him and put out his hand. Joe Hunt shook it.

"Easy trip?" Cramer asked. "How do you like the keelboat? Tarascon,

Berthoud and Company plan to make more of them, I think. They'll want to see you."

Hunt nodded. "It's all boat, Cramer. Easy to handle. Is Harry Kendall in Pittsburgh?"

"Unless you passed him on the river. He's either left or is planning to leave right away with a load of freight for Cincinnati."

"Whose freight?"

"Some man named Baker."

Hunt's eyes narrowed. "Fred Baker?"

"Yes. Know him?"

"Where could I find him?"

"He's living temporarily in the Stillwell house."

"Thanks, Cramer. See you later."

MOVING on past the printer, and turning up a side-street, Hunt came to an old log house with oilskin windows. A middle-aged man was sitting on a box in front of it, whitening on a block of wood.

"Mr. Baker?" Hunt asked.

The man looked up. "What can I do for you?"

"I've just come up the river," Hunt stated. "I brought you this." He reached into his pocket, withdrew a sheaf of papers and handed them to the man.

Baker took them, stared at them, and then got to his feet with a sharp exclamation of surprise. "Where did you get these?" he demanded.

"From the body of a man on the banks of the Ohio, about twenty miles this side of Cincinnati."

Baker's face paled. His lips worked convulsively. "Dead!" he gasped. "Griswald dead? I—I can't believe it!"

Joe Hunt nodded soberly. "The danger of travel on the Ohio is not so much a matter of Indian trouble or risky currents. During the past year or two we have been troubled more and more by bands of river pirates. There will be a hail from the bank from some person who will either be asking for help, or who says he wants to buy passage, or flour. The boat will put in to the shore. When it touches land, the pirates will swarm out from the underbrush. Many a cargo which has left here has never reached its destination, and many a boatman has disappeared somewhere down the Ohio, a victim of pirates."

Baker mopped a hand over his brow. "Eddie Griswald," he murmured. "Poor Eddie Griswald!" Then, in a louder and steadier voice: "Eddie was almost like a son of mine. I planned on opening a store in Cincinnati. He went on ahead with part of the supplies. I was held up here, waiting for other things which hadn't arrived. But you knew that from these papers, didn't you?"

Hunt nodded.

"Tell me," said Baker, "what you think happened."

"We were poling upstream," Hunt answered. "We heard the shooting, put in to shore and hurried along the bank. We got there in time to get three of the pirates, and I saw one other; but Griswald and the men with him were dead. Your supplies, by the way, were safe. We loaded them in my boat and took them on to Cincinnati, and had them stored there for you."

"Your name is—"

"Joe Hunt."

Baker put out his hand. "I want to thank you, Mr. Hunt. Would it offend you if I offered to pay for what you did?"

Hunt shrugged. "You can pay me for loading and unloading the freight, and for one day's portage."

There was a sound of voices from behind him. Hunt turned around. Approaching the cabin were the girl and boy he had seen at the dock. The boy recognized him and grinned. The girl caught her breath. She looked very much embarrassed.

"This is my daughter Catherine, and my son Tom, Mr. Hunt," Baker announced.

Joe Hunt nodded. "Glad to meet you."

Catherine's lips tightened. She nodded very curtly, and walking past Joe Hunt, entered the house.

"We're leaving tomorrow morning," Baker announced. "I have hired a man named Kendall to take us down the river. Do you know him?"

"Yes."

"He's a good boatman, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's a good boatman."

Baker sighed. "How much can I pay you, Hunt, for what you have done?"

Joe Hunt named an amount, took the money Baker proffered him and turned away. He thought he could see Catherine watching him from behind one of the windows, but he wasn't sure.

Walking slowly toward the central part of the town, Hunt's mind turned back to the late afternoon of that fight with the pirates, twenty miles above Cincinnati. Harry Kendall, the boatman Baker had hired to pilot him to Cincinnati, had been with the pirates that afternoon, he was sure. He had caught a bare glimpse of him as Kendall had wheeled to run away. But none of his men had seen Kendall, and there was nothing at the spot to indicate that Kendall had been one of the pirates. As Bill Youngerman had reminded him when they had docked, he had no proof against Kendall—no proof at all.

But proof or no proof, Joe Hunt decided, one thing was sure: He was

not going to let Baker be led into so obvious a trap as awaited him.

CHAPTER TWO

THERE was a noisy, boisterous crowd in the Blue Boar Tavern. While still three squares away, Hunt could hear snatches of song, the wailing notes of a fiddle and the deep raucous sound of laughter. He quickened his steps, reviewing in his mind the plan which had come to him.

It had been a busy afternoon: A part of it he had spent with Mr. Tarascon, the shipwright, and a part of it in casual investigation. He had located the boat Kendall was using to take the Bakers down the river. It was already loaded and ready to leave at dawn.

A man moved away from the shadow of a building and called his name. Hunt stopped, one hand moving unconsciously to the knife sheathed at his belt. Then he dropped his hand and said: "Arthur? You?"

The figure which moved up to him was tall, gaunt and stoop-shouldered. It was one of the men who had come upstream with him, Arthur Sassoon.

"Kendall's in the Blue Boar," Sassoon mentioned.

Hunt nodded. He hadn't run across Kendall all afternoon. In the back of his mind he had a notion that the man was avoiding him.

"What of it?" Hunt asked.

Sassoon scratched his jaw. "I heard some ugly talk this afternoon, Joe. I heard it whispered that you know more about the river pirates than you want to tell."

The lanky man stared down at the knuckles of his right hand. They were cut and swollen. Hunt noticed the hand, and he could imagine what had happened. Sassoon was hot-headed and loyal. Somewhere a man who had talked out of turn was probably nursing a swollen jaw.

"I do know something about the pirates," Hunt said grimly.

Another figure moved toward them, and he could see that it was Bill Youngerman, another of his crew.

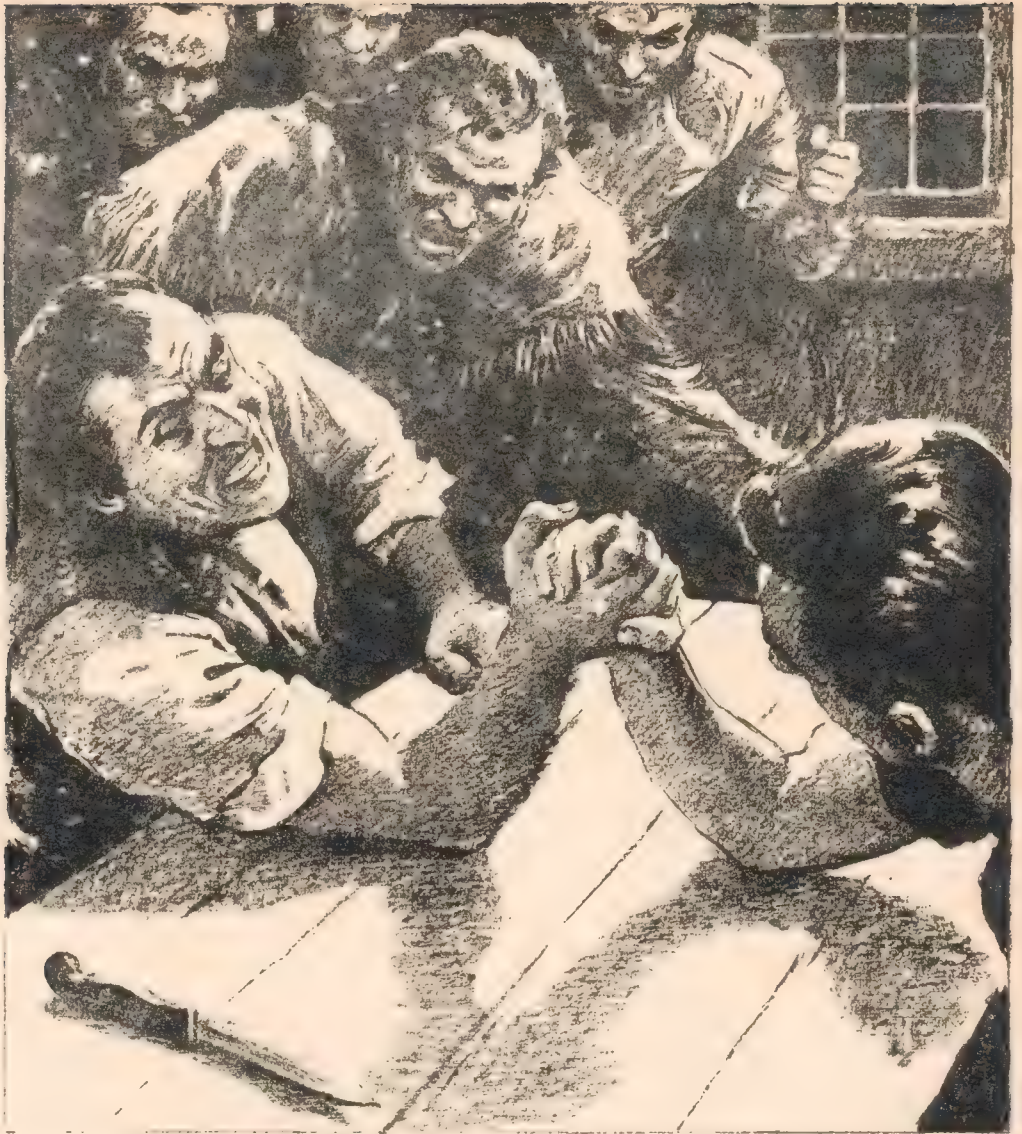
Youngerman, a short, heavy-set individual, nodded. "What you plan'nin', Joe?" he asked bluntly.

"Nothing—for a few hours," Hunt answered.

Youngerman scowled. "Kendall's runnin' off at the mouth. He's been drinkin' a lot. He's talkin' about what he plans to do to the pirates if they jump him."

A thin smile touched Hunt's lips. "That ought to be interesting. Let's go hear what he has to say."

Youngerman and Sassoon looked at each other, and Sassoon shrugged in a hopeless motion.



Whoever lost would have his knuckles ground against the sharp knife. . . . Hunt and Kendall locked hands.

Hunt laughed. He knew what these two men of his were thinking, as well as though they had spoken aloud. "I'll behave myself," he promised. "Now, come on."

They walked together to the Blue Boar, pushed open the door and entered; and at first their arrival was hardly noticed, for most of the men in the place were gathered in a crowd at the far end of the room, where two men seemed to be engaged in some kind of a contest. The crowd was yelling noisily.

Suddenly, with a shout of triumph, a huge, hulking figure reared up above the others and stared from side to side. "Who's next?" he called. "Who's next?"

The man's face was flushed and red. He had matted brown hair, a broad

nose, thick lips and almost no neck. His eyes were sharp and quick. They caught sight of Joe Hunt and rested for a moment on his face. Then a mocking glint came into them, and he called out. "Look who's come, men! Mr. Hunt himself. The greatest boatman on the Ohio—maybe!"

SEVERAL of the men in the crowd laughed. One or two frowned nervously. A lane opened between Hunt and the red-faced man.

"Hello, Kendall," Hunt said easily. "What's bothering you now?"

"Come here, boatman," Kendall invited.

Hunt walked forward. Kendall was standing, he saw, at the far side of a table. On the near side was an empty chair.

"Go ahead, Hunt. Take him," some man challenged.

Kendall was grinning. He had been drinking a lot, Hunt could tell, but he was still far from being drunk.

As Hunt came up to the table, Kendall sat down in his chair, rested an elbow on the table and extended his hand into the air. "For ten dollars, Hunt," he sneered, "I'll put your knuckles down on the boards."

Hunt pulled out the chair in front of him and sat down. He reached for the knife in his belt, took it out and laid it on the table about eighteen inches to one side of Kendall's elbow. "Put your knife on the other side," he said quietly.

A sharp silence fell over the men in the room. Kendall's eyes widened. He reached for his knife and laid it

on the other side of the table, then stared at Hunt. One of the men watching them sucked in his breath with a hissing sound. Everyone there could appreciate the situation: What a moment before had been a game had taken on a note of seriousness. In another moment, now, the two men would lock their hands, and each would try to force the other's hand over the table. Whoever lost would have the bare knuckles of his hand ground against the sharp blade of a knife.

Leaning forward, Joe Hunt put his elbow on the table.

"You said for ten dollars, Kendall?" he asked coldly.

"Or more if you want," Kendall flared.

Joe Hunt laughed softly. "Ten dollars, Kendall—and my boat against yours."

Kendall blinked. He moistened his lips and glanced from side to side; and in that moment, Joe Hunt knew that he would have backed out if he dared. Before this crowd of men, however, he had no chance of backing out.

"Yes, ten dollars an' my boat against yours," he said huskily.

Hunt locked hands with him. He felt the crushing pressure of Kendall's fingers. The cords of his forearm tightened. He strained against the pressure of Kendall's arm, but it was like pushing against the trunk of a mighty tree.

Into the silence of the room he heard Youngerman say casually: "Fifty dollars on Joe Hunt."

"Taken," someone snapped.

"Another fifty," said Youngerman quietly.

This time no one answered him.

PAIN crept down the muscles of Hunt's arm—pain reached up to his shoulder and spread across his chest. He stared at Kendall's face. Perspiration showed on Kendall's forehead and around his lips, and his breath was coming heavily.

Hunt tried to tighten the grip of his hand. He called on his muscles to exert a new pressure. He thought suddenly that he had moved Kendall's hand the least little bit, and a wave of confidence swept over him. New strength seemed to run into his arm. Slowly—slowly—slowly, he forced Kendall's arm toward the table. He could hear the heavy, labored breathing of the men gathered around them. He could see a sharp fear in Kendall's eyes.

Then, without any warning at all, Kendall's body lurched against the table and he jerked his hand away, scrambling backward and overturning his chair.

"Damn you," he screamed. "You kicked me! You didn't play fair! You kicked me!"

Joe Hunt got to his feet. He jerked the table out of his way and moved

forward until he stood in front of Kendall, and there he said, very deliberately: "You lie, Kendall. I didn't kick you. Suppose we try it again."

With an angry roar, Kendall stabbed a fist at his head. Hunt ducked, stepped forward and lashed out twice at Kendall's face, driving the bigger man backward. He ducked another blow, and hit him again.

Kendall shook his head as though to clear it, then charged at Hunt with both arms flailing. Hunt sidestepped and shot another blow at Kendall's face. Kendall stumbled and fell to the floor.

Joe Hunt looked down at him for a moment, and after that straightened up and stared around the room. Men were watching him strangely. In a way he could understand how most of them felt. Brawls they had had, many of them. But usually a good-natured raillery underlay their fighting. Since he had come into the room, however, a cold anger had ridden him, and they couldn't have helped but notice it. Seeing Kendall again, Hunt had been reminded of the scene on the banks of the Ohio River, miles to the west. Five men had been murdered there—murdered by Kendall and the pirates with him. Three of the dead men he had known. And in looking at Kendall, he had seen their faces before his eyes.

Staring down at the fallen man once more, Hunt's lips tightened. He



hadn't planned this fight, but he didn't regret it.

"How about a drink, Joe?" Youngerman suggested.

Hunt shrugged and turned toward the bar; then he stopped. The door had opened and half a dozen men had just come in. Two of them Hunt rec-

ognized as Fred Baker and Zadok Cramer. The others he didn't know.

Cramer raised his voice and said: "Hunt, come here a minute, will you?"

Hunt walked forward. He could see that Cramer was frowning, and that he seemed worried.

Cramer drew a deep breath. "About an hour ago, Joe," he said slowly, "a man got into town from the wilderness. He said that he had been a boatman with a fellow named Griswald who left here for Cincinnati, about a month ago. He told us Griswald and all the rest of his party were killed by pirates—said he was the only one that got away. And he said you was one of the pirates."

"Me?" Hunt gasped.

"Yes."

Hunt looked around at Kendall, who was sitting up holding his head.

"I got in touch with Baker, here," Cramer went on, "and Baker told me of your visit to him, and of what you said had happened."

Hunt looked back at Cramer. "Well?"

"I'd like to believe in you, Joe," Cramer continued. "In fact, I think I do; but a few minutes ago we picked up one of the men who came upstream with you. He had a watch on him, and Baker, here, identified it as Griswald's watch. He says he won it in a card-game here in Pittsburgh, but he couldn't name the others in the card-game. Anyhow, later we went down to your boat. There were several things there that Baker identified as Griswald's. So I guess we'll have to hold you until we can check up a little more."

JOE HUNT swiftly analyzed this charge against him. It was ridiculous, he decided, and could easily be disproved. The things on his boat could have been put there at Kendall's orders. The man who had come to Pittsburgh from the wilderness was obviously lying. But in spite of all that, keeping him in jail even for a day would give Kendall enough time to get away with Baker. And, once on the river, Baker and his family would be completely at Kendall's mercy.

Turning to Youngerman, who stood close to him, Hunt said in a low voice: "Don't start anything Bill. You an' Sassoon get out of here, look up the other boys and lay low. About three o'clock in the mornin' come down to the jail an' get me out. I don't know how you'll do it, but you've got to do it some way."

Youngerman nodded. "We'll tear the damn' thing apart if we have to," he muttered.

A faint smile touched Hunt's lips. He knew that his men would do even that if he ordered it.

Turning to Cramer, he nodded. "The charge is ridiculous, but I can see how you feel. Come on."

He headed for the door then, followed by Cramer and the men who had come with him. The boatmen in the Blue Boar were silent as he left.



Hunt overtook Catherine; sharp apprehension stabbed through him. For she was lying motionless at the side of the trail.

"This Joe Hunt?" demanded one of the men Hunt didn't know.

Cramer nodded.

"Hunt," stated the man, "you're under arrest."

Hunt looked from the man to Cramer, puzzled. His eyes happened to fall on Fred Baker. Baker was staring at him angrily.

"What's this all about, Cramer?" Hunt demanded bluntly.

AN old log house served as the jail. It was a substantial place with iron-barred windows and a heavy floor. There were two men in it besides Joe Hunt. One was a drunk who was asleep. The other was Ellis Cox, the boatman who had been found with Griswald's watch.

"I won the watch at cards, Joe," Cox kept saying over and over. "I won the watch in a game at the Blue Boar Tavern. Honest, I did. You believe me, don't you?"

Hunt said that he did. He said that it didn't matter. He said that over and over until he finally lost patience and cried: "Shut up, Ellis. Forget it. We've got to get out of here. Put your mind on that for a while."

Ellis Cox was hardly more than a boy, though work on the river had hardened his muscles and filled in his frame.

"Get out!" he demanded. "How?"

"I don't know," Hunt answered. "I just know we've got to get out."

During the hours which followed they examined every inch of their prison, tested the walls, the roof, the floors, the barred windows. In no place could they discover any weakness.

"This jail wasn't made to break out of," Cox muttered finally.

Joe Hunt had no answer, and as it drew close to three o'clock, he began to march back and forth across the room, wondering what he could say to Youngerman and Sassoon when they came to the barred window. For they would come. He was sure of that.

Suddenly, without any previous warning, a key sounded in the lock of the door and the door opened.

"Joe?" called a voice.

Joe Hunt turned that way. Framed in the entrance was Bill Youngerman, a wide grin on his face. Youngerman was swinging a key between his thumb and forefinger.

"This was the easiest way I could figure out," he explained. "Course, the man who had this key didn't like the notion of letting me use it, but he didn't put up much argument, at that."

"You didn't—"

"I just put him to sleep for a while, Joe."

Joe Hunt chuckled. He knew how Youngerman put men to sleep. It was a very effective method. But what amused him in particular was Youngerman's method of explanation. Sassoon or Cox or most of his other men would have said, bluntly, that they had knocked the man over the head.

"The rest of the boys," Youngerman added, "are down at the boat. They thought maybe we might go pirate-hunting."

Joe Hunt shook his head. "Pirate-baiting is a better way to put it. . . . Bill, do you know where the old Stillwell home is?"

"Sure."

"All right. You and Cox go up there. The family living there now is named Baker. Baker is the man whose stuff is loaded on Kendall's keelboat. They plan on leaving at dawn. Get them up now."

"Why?"

Hunt told Youngerman what he had in mind; and while he talked, a slow smile spread over Bill Youngerman's chubby face.

LOUD knocking on the door aroused Tom Baker. He sat up in bed, stared around the darkened room, then reached for his bow and arrows.

"Who's there?" called his father.

"Time to leave, Mr. Baker," said a voice from outside the cabin. "We want to get an early start."

Tom heard his father's groan, heard the scraping sound of a match, and in its sudden light saw his father sitting on the edge of the bed in his night-shirt.

Throwing back the covers, Tom got up. He laid aside his bow and reached for his clothes. He felt very excited. At last the hour had come. In a few minutes, now, they would be heading down the broad Ohio for the West.

His father had lighted the lamp and was pulling on his trousers. "Awake, Cathie?" he asked.

From beyond a screen that curtained off a part of the room, Tom's sister made unintelligible noises. Tom grinned. Cathie didn't like to get up early.

Finished with his dressing, Tom crossed over to a bundle on the floor and tugged it to the door. This bundle, and another to be made up of their blankets and a few articles of clothing, were all that were left to be taken down to the boat. Their other things had been carried away the night before.

Catherine came around the curtain, yawning and twisting her hair into place. She still looked half asleep.

Tom's father looked over at her and then called: "All right, Mr. Kendall. Come on in. We're about ready."

Tom opened the door, and a tall, thin man stepped into the room. He glanced over at Tom's father and said: "Kendall's down at the boat. This your stuff, here?"

Catherine and Tom's father were making another bundle out of their blankets, but suddenly Tom's father straightened and said: "What about breakfast?"

"We'll stop a ways down the river," the tall man stated.

"But won't that take more time?"

"Nope. I don't think so."

Whenever in the future Tom Baker was to look back on that hour of his family's departure from Pittsburgh, it was to seem to him very strange that they got ready and got away so quickly. And it was to seem strange, also, that none of them was the least bit suspicious that anything was wrong until it was too late to do anything about it.

Years later, trying to reconstruct in his mind all that happened, he recalled how the thin man had shouldered the bundle he had been pulling toward the door, and had called another man from outside the cabin to take the other bundle. Then, with those two men leading the way, he and his father and Catherine had started down toward the dock. There wasn't anything more said by any of them until they got there. He was sure of that. And there wasn't a soul waiting for them at the dock. He was sure of that, too, for his father seemed a little surprised, and asked: "Where's Mr. Kendall?"

Tossing his bundle into the keelboat, the thin man shrugged. "He'll be here in a minute. Guess you might as well go down to your quarters and get settled."

Tom's father helped him aboard, then turned to assist Catherine. They walked around to the cabin and entered it. The cabin wasn't very large; and a part of his father's supplies, which the men hadn't been able to stow elsewhere, were piled against the walls of the cabin. The cabin was supposed to be bullet-proof, and Tom's father had said that with the supplies against the wall there wasn't any question of it.

The tall, thin man lounged in the door of the cabin, wanting to know if there was anything he could do for them, and making suggestions about where they could make up their bunks. Tom could feel the rocking motion of the boat, could hear the lapping sound of water. He could almost imagine that they had started. There was a tight feeling in his chest, and his eyes were sparkling. He wondered if Mr. Kendall would let him steer the boat sometimes.

The thin man went away from the cabin door and closed it after him, and Tom's father glanced around the room and said: "Well, we'll be off in a few minutes now. I don't know—" He didn't finish his sentence. He was frowning, and Tom saw that his hand had suddenly dropped to the pistol stuck in his belt.

Tom didn't know that his father was thinking of what had happened to Eddie Griswald, and of the dangers which lay before them; and of the arrest, the night before, of the boatman who had seemed so nice but who had turned out to be a river pirate.



Illustrated by Maurice Bower

Catherine looked down at Joe Hunt. "I want to see him hanged," she said. Kendall laughed.
"You sure know how to hate, Cathie!"



He said to his father: "Dad, do you think Mr. Kendall will let me steer a part of the way?"

"Maybe, son. I don't know."

There were several small portholes in the cabin, but they were closed by blocks of wood. Catherine was standing near one of them, working out the block.

Tom looked at her. He started humming.

Suddenly Catherine caught her breath. "Father," she cried. "We're moving. The boat's started."

Tom's father blinked. He moved over to the porthole and stared outside. Then he turned to the door, opened it and called sharply for Mr. Kendall.

There was no direct answer, but from the stern of the boat Tom Baker could hear someone singing; and though the man's voice was quite low, he could easily distinguish the words:

*"Hi-o, away we go,
Floating down the river on the O-hi-o."*

"Mr. Kendall!" Tom's father called again.

The singing stopped, and someone asked: "What is it, Mr. Baker?"

Tom's father frowned, and again his hand slipped to his pistol. Something was wrong, Tom knew. He could sense it in his father's attitude.

"You children stay here," Mr. Baker ordered.

He moved out of the cabin and started around the side of the boat. Tom crept after him, and Catherine followed too. On the side of the boat down which they were staring Tom could see a man working one of the broad sweeps. It was the tall, thin man who had come up to the cabin after them.

Tom's father passed him, came to the far end of the cabin, and moved out of sight. Tom hurried forward. When he came to the corner of the cabin, he could see his father facing the steersman.

Catherine moved up to his shoulder. She caught her breath. "That—that's not Mr. Kendall," she whispered. "It's—it's—"

She didn't finish what she had started to say; but then she didn't have to, for Tom recognized the steersman. It was the man he had heard singing the day before as he had poled a boat upstream, the man who had later come to the cabin to see his father.

"So it's you!" Tom heard his father cry.

The man nodded.

"What do you intend to do?" demanded Mr. Baker.

"See that you get to Cincinnati—safely."

Tom's father laughed. It was a harsh laugh. It made Tom shiver. And then suddenly he was frightened, more frightened than he had ever been in his life, for he saw his father reach for his pistol, jerk it out and point it at the steersman's head. And he heard his father's voice saying, grimly: "Turn this boat around, Hunt, or I'll spatter your brains all over the river!"

For an instant Tom thought that the man was going to refuse to turn the boat around, and that his father was going to shoot him. Then, with a shrug, the steersman swung the tiller far to the left.

Tom couldn't see very clearly just what happened after that. The boat seemed to jump sidewise, and a heavy force threw him against the cabin. Catherine fell on top of him. As he went down, he saw his father staggering toward the side of the boat, flailing his arms to keep balance. Then, as the boat came around and steadied itself, Tom saw Catherine get up and start running toward the steersman, who was standing over Mr. Baker.

"You killed him! You killed him!" Catherine was screaming.

THE steersman turned and catching Catherine by the arms, he lifted her high in the air and held her there with seeming ease, though she twisted and squirmed and kicked and tried to get away. By the faint light of the coming dawn, Tom could see that the man was laughing.

"Put me down," Catherine cried. "Put me down, you—you beast!"

The man holding her laughed. "I'll put you over the side," he told her, "if you don't quit kicking. Your father isn't dead. Now be quiet and calm down."

Tom looked at his father. His father was sitting up, rubbing his head, looking dazed.

Catherine went suddenly limp and the man set her on the deck. He bent over and helped Mr. Baker to his feet. "We're goin' to put into a little cove down here a ways for breakfast," Tom heard him saying. "We'll talk things over then. Now suppose you get back to the cabin."

There was a tight, stubborn expression on Mr. Baker's face; but he put an arm around Catherine and nodded and started forward. Tom turned and hurried back to the cabin. He was pretty confused by what had happened, and there was a hollow, empty, sick feeling in his stomach. He wished, suddenly, that his father had never heard of Cincinnati, and he bit his lips to keep from crying and to stop his teeth from chattering.

FROM the steersman's post, Joe Hunt guided the keelboat down the broad waters of the Ohio. Youngerman and Cox, at the broadsweeps, rowed mightily. Rowing wasn't always a good plan, on the Ohio. Sometimes a rowed boat got out of the current and didn't make as good time as if it had drifted with the waters. But Joe Hunt knew his river as a boy knows his own back yard, and for a while, speed was essential.

He had heard nothing from the Bakers since they had returned to the cabin, but that fact didn't worry him. He had made sure of the fact that there were no weapons in the cabin when he and his men had surprised the guards Kendall had left on the boat, and had taken it over. There wasn't much, he decided, that the Bakers could do to help themselves. That scene on the deck he regretted. But it had been inevitable, and he was glad that it was over.

"There's the place," Bill Youngerman called, pointing over to the bank of the river.

Hunt nodded and turned the boat that way. After a minute he caught sight of another keelboat, his own, which had come on ahead. A fire was burning on the shore. Breakfast would be ready.

Steering the boat expertly to the little cove chosen by his men, Hunt lowered the anchor and tossed a rope to Arthur Sassoon.

"Any trouble?" Sassoon inquired.

Hunt shook his head. He made his way to the cabin door and knocked.

Baker opened it. "What do you want?"

"Breakfast is ready," Hunt stated.

From behind her father Catherine's voice came to him sarcastically: "Do we actually eat before we die? Is that the pirate's way?"

Joe Hunt grinned. "Yes, actually. Smell the coffee?"

Baker stared at him coldly. "We might as well have this out right here, Hunt," he insisted. "What do you plan to do with us?"

Joe Hunt drew a deep breath. He said: "All right, Baker. Here's the story: The leader, or at least one of the river pirates who murdered Griswald's party, was Harry Kendall. I know that to be a fact, for I saw him with them. But I had no other proof; and the word of one man against another is worth very little. Anyhow, when I heard that Kendall was taking you downstream, I could easily guess what would happen. Somewhere, along the way, there would be an attack. Kendall would 'escape,' or so at least, he would call it. I took this boat and started downstream for two reasons: First, to get you to Cin-

cinnati safely. Second, because I knew that if I took this boat, it would give Kendall every excuse in the world to come after us with his men. Back in Pittsburgh, by this time, they are thinking of me as a pirate. All Kendall has to do is catch me and kill me. He'll jump at the chance, for his pride as well as a rich cargo is involved. But I've got some plans along that line too."

Baker's face darkened. "You expect me to believe you?"

"I wish you would."

"Well, I don't."

Hunt shrugged. "This boat we're on," he stated, "is going to be poled a few miles up this little stream by some of my men. You and your family will go with it. Tonight—"

"And tonight you will kill us."

"No, tonight you will drift back to the Ohio and follow us on down. My boat will be the bait. It looks exactly like the other, and will be heavily loaded with men. It will sit low in the water. Maybe you see now what I plan."

"It's at least a good story, Father," Catherine said angrily.

Hunt squinted at the girl. He liked her spirit. Many another woman, he thought, would have been in hysterics by this time. "Suppose we eat," he suggested.

Without waiting for a reply, he turned and stepped over to the running-boards and dropped to the shore.

The men waiting there gathered around him. In addition to his own men, there were half a dozen other boatmen Sassoon had picked up, men he knew, men who believed in him.

"Sassoon," Hunt ordered, "pick out eight men, pole that boat up the stream to a place about a half-mile above the road. Then hurry back here. The Bakers can walk up later."

Sassoon nodded. He picked out his men, got aboard the loaded keelboat.

"Come on, Baker," Hunt called.

Baker and his son and daughter came out of the cabin. Tom was clinging to his father's hand, but the girl stared around defiantly. She must have been frightened, Hunt knew, but she showed no signs of it.

Hunt saw that the Bakers were served with breakfast, then ate his own food. The loaded boat had disappeared up the stream flowing into the Ohio. It would take an hour, Hunt figured, for those men of his to get the boat to the place he had chosen and then return. But that was all right. He had, he was sure, much more than an hour's start on any pursuit which might be arranged. And he didn't want to travel so fast that Kendall couldn't overtake him. Kendall would follow, he was sure; and he looked forward, grimly, to the moment when the pirates would strike.

One of Hunt's men came forward and touched him on the shoulder. "Look," the fellow whispered, pointing.

Joe Hunt stared up the stream. Catherine Baker was strolling along the bank, stooping over now and then to pick up a rock or pluck a flower. She was getting farther and farther away from the camp.

Hunt got to his feet. He stared toward the girl and then looked at her father. Fred Baker's hands were clenched tightly together. There was a tense expression on his face.

"Hey, there," Hunt called. "Come back here."

Catherine Baker straightened. She glanced over her shoulder. Then like a startled deer she ran swiftly toward a clump of bushes and dodged around them. Hunt caught several glimpses of her skirt as she fled up the riverbank. He whirled around to face Baker.

"You put her up to this," he said flatly.

Baker nodded grimly. "And that girl of mine can run. You'll never catch her, Hunt. She's safe from you, at least."

"Safe from me!" Hunt cried. "Safe from me? Why, you fool, she was always safe from me. But do you know where you've driven her? We're at least forty miles from Pittsburgh. There isn't a farmhouse within twenty miles. This is an Indian country. The woods are full of wild beasts. There isn't a chance—"

"But the road. There's a road—"

"The road? It's no more than a trail. Call her back. Call her back while she can still hear you."

SOMETHING in Joe Hunt's tone of voice or perhaps in his face must have warned Baker he was speaking the truth. The older man's face paled. He faced up the river and called his daughter's name. He called it over and over.

There was no answer.

Tom called, his shrill cry high and penetrating. But there was still no answer.

Joe Hunt swung to face his men. He hadn't exaggerated at all in what he had said to Baker, and these men knew it.

"I should have watched her," he muttered, "but I didn't dream that she would try a thing like this."

His men waited silently, watching him.

"What do you want to do?" Hunt asked them. "Call it off, or go ahead? I'll have to go after the girl. I may be able to catch her right away. It may take me all day. If you want to go ahead with what we planned, I'll find her and bring her back to the other boat, then try to catch up with

you by hurrying along the wilderness road."

The men looked at one another. "I'm for going ahead," stated Youngerman.

The others nodded.

Joe Hunt squinted up at the sun. "Give me an hour," he suggested. "If you don't hear from me in an hour, get in the boat and start downstream. Remember, all but three of you keep out of sight in the cabin."

Turning away then, Joe Hunt started running up the river-bank, following the course taken by the girl. He heard Baker call his name but he didn't look around, didn't hesitate. Ahead and to the left he saw a broken twig, beyond it a place where foot-steps had scuffed up the leaf-mold, beyond that place an overturned stone. The course taken by the girl was easy to follow.

NOT once did he question that he would overtake her. The only thing which bothered him was how much time it would take. He was anxious to get back to the boat, to be in on the finish which he was sure lay ahead.

The girl's trail led away from the river; and coming to the wilderness road he saw that the girl had recognized it, had turned to the east. Hunt ran more swiftly now, and as silently as possible. The trail climbed over a ridge, dipped down into a little valley and climbed again. Here and there along its course he could mark evidences of the girl's flight.

Joe Hunt was sure that the girl couldn't be far ahead. She wouldn't keep running, he told himself. She would run for a while, and then when winded she would walk a piece, then run again. Such a pace, taken altogether, was never very fast. It wouldn't be long, he felt, until he overtook her. But fifteen minutes passed and then fifteen minutes more, and he hadn't come in sight of her, hadn't even caught a glimpse of her dress through the trees.

A slow anger swept over him, an anger directed at himself, as the ridiculousness of the situation which confronted him, struck home to his mind. He had worked out an elaborate and risky plan to trap the river pirates; and now, when he should be sitting back waiting for the trap to close, he was off chasing a girl through the woods. A brittle laugh cracked from his throat, and he increased his pace.

Fifteen minutes later he overtook her; and when he first saw her, a sharp apprehension stabbed through his chest, for she wasn't running. Instead, she was lying motionless at the side of the trail, one arm flung up over her head, the other stretched out at her side.

Hunt rushed forward. He knelt beside her and dropped a hand to her shoulder. The girl rolled over suddenly. She sat up, then scrambled away from him. Her face was flushed, and she was breathing heavily. She had been crying, too.

"You shouldn't have run like that," Hunt said slowly. "Didn't you hear your father calling you back? Didn't you—"

"A trick," the girl gasped. "You made him."

"No, I didn't make him. I—" Hunt's voice broke off. He straightened, stared toward the east. Through the trees he could hear the sound of galloping horses.

The girl must have heard them too, for she got to her feet, and a look of triumph came over her face.

"Help!" she called loudly. "Help! Help! Quickly!"

Joe Hunt started toward her, but she eluded his grasp, and raising her voice, cried out again.

Then, through the trees ahead, burst a group of horsemen. They swept up to where Hunt and the girl were standing, and several of the men swung to the ground before their horses stopped. Primed and ready pistols covered Joe Hunt; and from the back of a horse, Harry Kendall stared down at him balefully.

Hunt expected no mercy from these men. He thought that in another minute their guns would blast his life away. With a desperate lunge he threw himself at the man who stood closest to him. The man's pistol exploded almost in his face, and powder burned against his cheek, but his stabbing fist smashed against the man's jaw and hurled him backward.

"Don't shoot!" Kendall was shouting. "Don't shoot! Take him alive! Take him alive!"

Half a dozen of them closed in around him. Hunt's long arms jabbed out at their faces. Someone grabbed him from behind; and reaching up over his head, Joe Hunt caught the man around the neck, bent forward and hurled him over his shoulders. Twice more then did his rocklike fists stagger Kendall's men. But the odds against him were too great. Someone dived for his legs and pulled him to the ground. Feet kicked out at him. A heavy blow seemed to tear off the side of his head. He tried to get up, but a man's boot shoved him down, and from what seemed like a long distance away he heard Kendall's voice saying: "All right, that's enough for a while. Tie him up."

A rope was passed around his arms and legs, binding him securely. Then he heard Kendall's voice again; and staring up, he saw that Kendall had dismounted and was bending over him.

"Well, Hunt," Kendall mocked, "hardly expected to see you so soon. An' with the girl, too! You go after 'em fast. Or maybe the girl ran away, huh, an' you set out after her?"

Joe Hunt made no answer. He saw Catherine Baker come forward and touch Kendall on the arm.

"Hurry," she whispered insistently. "My father and brother are just a little ways ahead. We stopped for breakfast. I—"

"You ran, huh?"

Catherine nodded.

"That would be Enders' Cove," Kendall decided. Then, frowning: "How many men were with this fellow here?"

"I don't know, but some of them will go with the other boat," Catherine answered.

"Catherine," Hunt shouted, "don't tell him. This man—"

Kendall lashed out with his boot and kicked Hunt in the side. "Shut up, you!" he growled. Then facing the girl, he asked: "What other boat?"

"He expected to be followed," Catherine said swiftly. "Your boat was poled up a stream just a little ways from here. They planned to hide it there."

Kendall scowled. "Just what did this fellow tell you, anyhow?"

IN clipped sentences, Catherine told Kendall the story Hunt had related to her father in the doorway of the keelboat's cabin; and listening to her, Joe Hunt tasted deeply of the bitterness of defeat. By the expression on Kendall's face he could tell that the pirate understood what he had planned. And he knew what Kendall's answer would be. He would let the keelboat float on down the river with its load of hidden men. It would not be hailed from the bank by the pirates. Instead, Kendall would move on to where the other boat was hidden, take it over, move it on down to the river and follow in the wake of the first boat. The goods could be disposed of at some settlement on the way. He had played directly into Kendall's hands.

When the girl had finished, a wide grin came to Kendall's face, and he called the other men around him and repeated her story. The river pirates roared at the humor of the situation. One of them said: "Hell, Kendall, we ought to make Joe Hunt a partner."

Watching the girl's face, Joe Hunt saw her eyes widen, and saw an expression of doubt come into them.

"What'll we do, Kendall?" asked another of the men.

"Move on to where they hid the boat and take it over," Kendall decided. "You an' Sam go ahead, see if the cove is clear, if the other boat's pulled out."

"What about the girl?" someone demanded.

Kendall laughed. "I'll take care of the girl."

Catherine Baker's face had paled. There was a dazed, bewildered expression in her eyes. She stared down at Hunt, stared over at Kendall, moistened her lips.

"Come here, Cathie," the man ordered.

Catherine Baker moved over toward Kendall. "You—you're going to save my father?" she whispered.

"Sure thing," Kendall laughed.

Hunt stared at the girl in astonishment. It was inconceivable that she shouldn't have understood that Kendall and these men were pirates.

"Hop up on my horse," Kendall suggested. "We had these nags pastured across the river from Pittsburgh for some job like this. Lucky, huh?"

Catherine nodded. She climbed up on the horse, then looked down at Joe Hunt. "What about him?"

Kendall reached for his gun.

"No." Catherine said sharply. "I want to see him hanged. I want to see him hanged on the highest gallows a man can build. I want to be there."

The girl's voice broke off. She was trembling and was terribly pale.

Kendall roared. "You sure know how to hate, Cathie! How about these trees? They're high enough."

"But now's too soon. I want him to think about it for a while. I want him to think about hanging, about how a rope will feel around his neck."

Once more Kendall laughed; then mounting the horse behind Catherine, he ordered: "Mark, bring Joe Hunt along with us. We'll take care of this hangin' business a little later."

Someone picked up Hunt and draped his body over the back of a horse. . . .

Lying at the foot of a tree, his arms and legs still bound, and now with a gag in his mouth, Hunt heard Kendall and his men lay their plans. Word had been received that the cove was clear, and the man sent on ahead reported that there were only three guards on the hidden boat, besides Baker and his son. The pirates were planning to attack at dusk.

In the hours which had followed his capture, Hunt had had a great deal of time to think things out. Catherine's attitude, he tried to believe, was all put on. She knew Kendall for what he was, and the part she was playing was courageous, and tragic too, for there could be no help for either of them.

Kendall's voice reached his ears. "All right, Sam; you fellows close in from way over there. Wait for my signal."

They were close to the hidden boat, Hunt knew. And the sky was begin-

ning to darken. Everything was set for the final scene.

"Where's the girl?" Kendall asked.

"She said she was going with Sam," someone answered. "Anyhow, I think she's sneakin' down toward the boat."

Kendall muttered a curse. He said sharply: "All right, let's get started. Why in hell didn't you tell me the girl had started for the boat?"

Joe Hunt heard the men tramping away. He tried to sit up. Behind him a branch cracked. He turned his head. Catherine was slipping toward him from behind a tree. She reached his side and bent over him. A knife cut his bonds, freed him.

JOE HUNT got to his feet. His legs were so numb that he could hardly stand; his arms felt paralyzed. He started rubbing his hands together desperately.

"They've gone," whispered the girl. "I didn't know. I—"

Hunt reached up and took the gag from his mouth. He reached for the knife in the girl's hand.

"I stole it from one of the men," Catherine shuddered.

Hunt's hand tightened on the knife. He thought of the four men and the boy on the hidden boat. The addition of one more man wouldn't help them much, for at least a dozen river pirates were with Kendall. But at least he could join those on the boat. Five men were better than four, could last longer, could do more damage.

Putting a hand on the girl's shoulder he said: "Catherine, there's no hope for us down there. I can't lie to you about this. You know what you face if Kendall catches you. Listen, girl: Head for the river-bank, watch for the first boat that comes along and swim out to it. Understand? You may have to hide for a day, maybe two days. But there'll be a boat along. Now get started."

He gave the girl a little push, then turned around and started running down the hill, crashing through the bushes. He was making a lot of noise, he knew; and somewhere ahead of him and between him and the hidden boat were pirates. There was a chance that he would run right into them, but he couldn't avoid that risk. Unless he hurried, he would be too late.

A sudden scream, much like the scream of a panther, sounded across the valley. Kendall's signal! Joe Hunt stopped. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted: "Pirates! Pirates! Pirates!" Then he ran on.

Gunfire broke out somewhere ahead of him; men's shouts reached his ears, and above those shouts he could hear the shrill cry of Tom Baker, repeated again and again.

Bursting into a clearing, he saw the keelboat drawn up in the shelter of a

grove of trees close to the bank of the stream. Near it, on the shore, were sprawled the figures of two men. More men were on the deck, battering at the doors of the cabin.

Hunt tripped over the broken branch of a tree and fell to the ground. He got up and clutched for the branch. It was short and heavy, still green. His lips tightened, and he charged forward.

Those men on the boat didn't see him coming. There couldn't have been any other explanation for what happened. Springing to the deck of the boat, Hunt dropped his knife and seizing the club with both hands, swung it at the men clustered in front of the cabin. One of the pirate's heads cracked open like an eggshell; two more sprawled away under the force of his blow.

Hunt gave a wild yell and swung the club from side to side like a man gone mad. And he *had* gone mad. He was never afterward able to recall anything that happened during the remainder of that fight: How he battled his way to the door of the cabin, how he turned, then, and cleared the decks of the pirates, had to be told to him after the fighting was all over. He didn't even recall that the cabin door had opened, and that Baker and Sassoon and the two other men had come out and joined him. His first conscious memory after jumping onto the deck was when Sassoon bent over him to pry his fingers loose from Harry Kendall's throat.

"It's all over, Joe," Sassoon told him. "Kendall's dead. Let him be."

Joe Hunt stood up then and mopped a hand over his brow. "All—over?" he asked vaguely.

Sassoon nodded. "We thought, Baker an' me, that there were at least a dozen men with you when we busted out on the deck, but you were all alone. Or at least, I don't see any others."

Hunt stared from side to side. He saw several motionless figures on the deck, two more in the water. Near the cabin door Fred Baker was holding his daughter in his arms. Tom was standing close to them, hanging on to his bow. He had one arrow fitted to the string, and was looking jerkily from side to side.

Walking to where the Bakers stood, Hunt said to Catherine: "You didn't go to the river. You followed me!" He felt vaguely irritated that she hadn't done as he had advised her.

"Of course I followed you," Catherine answered sturdily. "Did you think I'd run away?"

THE keelboat was headed down the Ohio River; standing at the prow, young Tom Baker looked to the west. It was dark, and over to the left a

shadow attracted his attention. He lifted his bow, fitted an arrow to it and glued his eyes on the shadow. After a while the shadow seemed to fade out, and he lowered his bow. But he still kept a close watch. That bow and arrow of his had come in handy about a week before in the fight with the river pirates. Even Joe Hunt, when he had heard the story of how he had shot his arrows through one of the cabin's portholes, had complimented him.

Tom wondered what Cincinnati was like, and wondered why more people didn't head down the Ohio for the West. Shimmering under the starlight, the river looked just like a broad highway. And it was a broad highway, a highway which was to open up a wilderness. For in the decade to follow, thousands of families were to move down it, towns and settlements were to dot its banks, and in the broad meadows to either side, ringing axes were to announce the clearing away of the timber for farms and homes.

It is probable, however, that this wouldn't have seemed very exciting to Tom Baker, even had he known it. And he decided after a while to walk back to the stern and talk to Joe Hunt. But rounding the cabin, he stopped, and then a heavy frown creased his brow. Catherine was standing at Joe Hunt's side. She was standing very close to him. It occurred to Tom that Catherine had been taking up quite a lot of Joe's time lately. He didn't like it.

"Of course I followed you," he heard Catherine say. "And I'd follow you again tomorrow."

Joe Hunt laughed softly. "Down any hill, Catherine?"

For a moment Catherine was silent, then she said: "Yes, any hill, Joe."

"But all boatmen are rowdies and drunkards," Joe reminded her.

"I know one who won't be," Catherine answered.

Still watching them, Tom Baker saw Joe Hunt put his arm around Catherine and heard him whispering something about bigger boats, about what he was planning to do next year.

Tom turned away in disgust. He had thought that Joe was like him, that Joe didn't have any use for girls. What Joe could see in Catherine he couldn't understand.

Moving up to where Arthur Sassoon stood working one of the broad sweeps, Tom demanded: "Sing me that song."

"What song?" asked the boatman.

"You know: *Hi-o*."

Sassoon chuckled. "All right, son. I aint so good as Joe, but here goes:

*"Hi-o, away we go,
Floating down the river on the O-hi-o!"*



PRODUCTION

MY boss Rusty Rhodes, the superintendent, was sitting in his swivel chair, and he had a lot of blueprints spread out in front of him on his flat-topped desk. It was hot in his glass-and-metal office, and the old man had his coat off and was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, his vest dangling from his skinny frame. The pockets in his vest were sagging from the weight of pencils, pen-lights, metal scales, scratch pads and cigarettes.

"Got a hot job, Cass," he said. He spread out a bony hand, palm down, and put it on a blueprint.

"They're always hot," I said.

"S'matter, Cass?" he asked me. I didn't answer him. I was counting the blue veins that crisscrossed the back of his hands; there must have been a hundred.

"The Government's pushing us on this one," he said. "Everybody in the front office has been on my neck."

"Everything's hot and everybody's pushing us," I said. "When are we going to get a job that we can take our time with, so we can do it right?"

"You kicking?" he asked.

"What's the job?" I said. "We'll do it."

The old man smiled. "Knew you would," he said; "you always do; that



PUP One touch of nature makes the whole line work. by Harden De View

crew of yours is the best damned production gang in the country."

"They were," I corrected him. "I broke up two fights this week. Everybody's edgy, and jumping at each other's throats."

"It's the heat," the old man said.

The heat was only part of it. My boys had all been working hard, putting in long hours because we were short of help and their nerves were worn thin. I was having trouble with absentees, for the boys just weren't coming in to work as regularly as they once did: they'd wish themselves into a nice comfortable cold and take a day's vacation. Everybody was tired

and worked out, and I was no exception.

As a matter of fact, and you can keep this under your hat, I was reading the help-wanted ads myself; I call them "escape literature."

"This job," said the boss, "is a new anti-aircraft shell. It's turned out pretty well in field tests."

"Is that the 155mm. shell I've been hearing about?" I asked.

"The casing, the part you're going to machine, is about 155mm. in diameter," he said. "Your tolerances are going to be as close on that as though you were doing tool work, but your schedule is going to be a killer." He

mentioned the number of shells we were supposed to produce every month. Precision work, in production quantities.

"It's important that we get a machine line set up as soon as we can," the boss said. His telephone rang and he picked up the receiver and snarled into it. He nodded a few times, and once measured something off by holding his hand up from the top of his desk. Television, when it comes, will be a big help to anyone who talks over the telephone to the boss. He put the phone down and spoke to me. "Cass, you'll have to hold the fort for a minute. I'll be right back." He got up and left the office.

I COULD hear the sounds of my department beneath me: the rolling, thumping roar of production in high speed. There in the office I could feel the vibration from a hundred heavy machines, and I could pick out individual noises and identify them with the job they were doing.

Jack Bingham, my long, tall, slow-moving mountaineer set-up man, came swinging into the office; and I could tell that he was excited because he was moving faster than a walk. He was followed by a dog, which under ordinary circumstances would be a very strange sight in a factory; but these are not ordinary times, and the dog was no ordinary dog.

"Cass," Jack said, "Pete's in a fam-bly way." He juggled a wad of tobacco around in his mouth, but he forgot to unload the juice before he spoke, and I watched his Adam's apple do a tango.

"You mean?" I said.

"Yup," Jack said, "pups."

I looked at the dog. She had a long, graceful body, hair that was tan and white with here and there a touch of black, and a long, thin nose that was snuffling along the floor. A white mark ran from either ear and met just above her nose at a point between her eyes. The brown on her head looked like the visor of a cap, and the white markings formed a rough triangle on her forehead.

That was Pete, and she didn't care whether we were talking about her or not. She plunked herself down by the door of the office and closed her weary eyes.

Just then the boss returned, and he didn't see the dog as he threw open the door and came barging in. He stepped smack on the tip of Pete's tail.

Things happened all at once. Noise exploded from every direction. The boss backed up and yelled, turning the air blue with a string of cuss-words



*Illustrated
by
H. Weston
Taylor*

*Pete had had
her puppies.
Each had a V
on its forehead.
"Say, Cass, who
do I have to see
to get one of
these?" the boss
asked.*

that would have been a credit to any top sergeant. Pete put her head forward and down between her stiff front legs. Her rear end was raised, her tail in a tight curl over her back. She yelped short, choppy barks of excitement and fright. Jack and I yelled at her as the old man, huddled in a corner, scared stiff, pleaded with us to call her off. Jack grabbed her by the nape of the neck. She steadied at his touch.

"Pet her," I told the boss, almost losing my job.

"Get it out!" the boss shouted. "Get that dog away from here!"

"Let 'er smell your hand," said Jack, "and she'll make up to you."

The boss just glared, first at Jack, then at me, and then at Pete.

"I said, 'Get that dog out of here,' and I mean it." The old man was trembling, he was so mad. He looked as if he was about to cry.

Pete waved her tail and rolled her big brown eyes. She was ready to kiss and make up, but the boss wasn't. His fists were doubled up, and he stamped a foot as his voice roared out against us.

Jack took Pete out of the office, and I could see that he was disgusted with the old man. After the two of them left, and the boss had cooled off a bit, I explained to him about Pete.

"Pete's our mascot," I said. "She just happened into the shop one night,

liked it, and stayed here. The boys have all been feeding her from their lunches. You'd be surprised how much that dog knows about what's going on down there. She understands production. Why, do you know—" I didn't get a chance to tell the boss any more. He just wouldn't listen.

"Well, I don't like dogs," the boss said. "Get that dog out of this shop. Too much damnfoolery going on down there, anyway. Get that dog out!" He was certainly definite.

"The boys won't like throwing her out in her condition," I said. "She's going to—"

"Get her out, and that's orders," he said. He passed it off. "Come up to

the Tool Design with me. I want to go over some of these set-ups with you."

"Not right now," I said. "I'll be along in a jiffy, but I got some business to take care of first."

"What?" asked the nosey old man.

"Well," I said, "I think I ought to go down and get Pete out of here."

I walked down through the department, around the big turret-lathes, past the Cincinnati grinders and big presses; and as I walked, I automatically ducked my head and watched things out of the corners of my eyes, the way a shop man will; sudden death has a way of coming to the dreamers in a shop.

I found Pete in the back of the department, where the boys had fixed her up with a large cardboard carton with one side cut away so she could get in and out easily. There was fresh sawdust in the bottom of the box.

Jack Bingham and two of my operators were standing beside the box. Pete was sitting there as big as life, enjoying all the attention.

I reached into the box, and Pete nuzzled the back of my hand with a cold nose. I scratched her behind her ears. Her hair was soft to my touch. I wriggled a finger very lightly on her nose between her eyes. She smacked my hand with a very wet red tongue.

PETE was mostly collie, with soft brown eyes and a long, thin, pointed face. Her tan and white hair curled slightly along her back. The mutt had an intelligent look in her face.

"When is she expecting?" I asked Jack.

He rolled his cud of tobacco around in his mouth and spat very carefully before he answered: "Don, here, used to be a veterinarian. He says three or four weeks."

"Yeah, I'm still a vet," said Don. He is a Warner and Swasey operator, and a good man. He's short and chubby, with almost no hair and light blue eyes. "After work I practice my profession."

"Three or four weeks, hey?" I said. I rubbed the back of Pete's neck. She drew her dewlaps back in a smile that was near human. "The boss says we have to get her out of the shop."

"I could take her for a run around the block," said Jack.

"If the boss sees her," I said, "we'll be in the soup."

"What if he doesn't see her?" asked Jack.

"He'll be happy," I said.

"Okay," Jack grinned. "We'll take care of things."

It's a funny thing the way a dog can affect a man, and Pete certainly did a lot of morale-building in the next few weeks. She took the men's minds off of things. The Bullard operator was

making book that there would be five or more puppies in the litter, and giving odds; and there were plenty of side bets on the pups' colors—which, with a dog like Pete, is an even-money bet any time. There were plenty of wagers as to the day of the blessed event, and the attention never turned Pete's head at all. She just smiled and pumped her tail, and remained calm and well-behaved, as any well-bred lady would.

I didn't mind the fuss. I noticed that production had taken a jump for the better; there were fewer lay-offs among the men, and not half so many machines were breaking down. We didn't have any more fist-fights, and as the men grew better-natured, they took more of an interest in their jobs. It may sound funny to say that a dog that is about to have pups could cause all that, but it's true; and it's true because the men were all pulling together for that one thing; and where they will pull together on one thing, they will also cooperate on others. It's a kind of delightful circle.

The hot job that the boss had talked to me about was going along swell. Jack Bingham had gone to work with a will. We were setting up the machines and bringing them into the line without any trouble. I had most of the machines placed, and I told the boss that we'd be in production inside of a week.

"That's good," he said, "because Washington just called here and wants to know if we can ship a carload of those shells next Friday."

"No," I said.

"Why not? You just told me that you were already to machine." He



"I would have sworn I saw that dog."

wrinkled the tight skin on his forehead.

"I said we'd be ready to start production inside of a week. But we won't have any carload machined, painted and packed and ready to go out of here Friday."

"You're slipping, aren't you, Cass," he said. I didn't like the old duck right then, not by a damnsight.

"Our other production has picked up," I said.

"We're talking about the new shell," he said. "Washington called here, and everybody has been putting the pressure on me. I promised 'em we'd have the carload. You're going to put me in the middle if you don't get them."

I got what he was driving at, with no trouble at all. If the heat was on the front office, they'd turn it on him; and when they turned it on him, he'd just naturally slip the bag to me, and I'd be left holding it because there was nobody I could blame. I'm the last guy in line.

"We haven't got all the machines in there yet," I said. "We still have to get the Bullard from the back yard and put it in the line, and that's a good day's job in itself. How about the other grinder that was promised? Am I going to get that?"

"We bought a new grinder, and it'll be here sometime today," he said. "It looks as if it's all up to you, Cass." There was something threatening in the way he said that. "Everything's all set to go, except your department."

Production is something you just pull out of your sleeve as far as the brass-hats are concerned. Well, I'd have to get set up and going, or my name wouldn't be Cass Quincy; it would be Unprintable.

"Say, Cass," the boss called after me, "how about that dog? Did you get her out of here all right? The boys didn't put up too much of a fuss, did they?"

"No," I said. "They didn't say a word."

"Good," he said. "The shop's no place for a dog anyway."

I WALKED out of his office and down I near the end of the machine line. I was feeling pretty low. Then I spotted Pete: She was sitting up in her box, and she was watching the shells as they moved on our endless conveyor. Her long-nosed thin head would start from over her left shoulder, and as she watched the shells, it would move clear over to her right shoulder, then snap back again and follow another shell. She was watching the shells so intently, and seemed so wise about it all, that I couldn't help but watch her; as I watched, I suddenly laughed out loud. We'd get those shells out, all right! I reached down and scratched her ears just for luck.

I told Jack Bingham about my talk with the boss, and he told me that he would do everything he could to speed up the job. I got hold of the foreman of the bull gang and told him to move the Bullard in from the back yard, and I let him know that it was a job that had to be done in a hurry.

I started the fireworks off, and I had to stay and see them through. I didn't go home at five o'clock, which is my quitting-time. I stayed to supervise the moving of the machine, and I kept Jack and a couple other operators with me. I called my wife and told her I'd be late for supper, and she said she'd put the meat-loaf back in the oven and keep it warm until I did get home. When it got dark and there wasn't much that I could do until the machine came in from the back, I went up to the office and lit a cigarette. The boss came into the office.

"Thought I'd find you here," he said.

"I'm staying until we get that line set up," I said.

"Me too," he said. "The thing is so hot that I decided to come back after I'd had supper." He dropped his long, lean corpse into a chair. The bones of his kneecaps looked as though they were about ready to split his pants. He clamped his false teeth into the end of a cigar and lit up.

"You know, Cass," he said, "I would have sworn I saw that dog on my way in here." He looked at me, and he didn't blink his eyes.

"What dog?" I asked.

"The one I told you to get rid of."

"Where'd you say you saw her?" I asked. "What street?"

"No street," he said. "In here, in the plant."

"Oh," I said, "that must have been a cat you saw. Lots of cats around here. They feed on the mice."

"Looked like a dog to me," he said. He was watching my face, but I didn't give anything away. I'm a good liar.

The afternoon shift was going to town outside my office, and the steady beat of noise seemed far away.

WE were concentrating on seeing who could blow the largest smoke-rings, and I had a good ring started when Jack Bingham busted in on us. The draft from the door ruined my smoke-ring.

"Boss—" Jack said. I waited for him to say more while he balanced his tobacco on his tongue and leaned over and unloaded the juice into the gaboon. He wiped his chin off delicately with the back of his big hand.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"You know that dog?" he asked.

"Yes?"

"Well, you know where we got that box fixed up for her?" He always told things by asking questions. "Well,

that's the spot where they want to put the Bullard. We're ready to make the move, but Pete aint."

"What?" I felt my neck getting hot. I turned and saw the old man glaring at us. Jack saw him too. He began to stutter, but he had said so much now that there was no back-tracking.

"Don says Pete aint due for about three days yet, and we—that is, the fellows— Well, we don't like to move her, and we want to know if it'd be all right to wait a couple of days."

This time the old man said something, most of it stuff that the censors don't like, and he said it in no uncertain terms.

"You'll make that move now," he said. "Right now, and I don't mean maybe. If you don't, you'll be making a move. If you hold up that job so much as for a minute because of that—that mutt, you can consider yourselves fired. Both of you! All of you." The boss should have considered his blood-pressure. His face was a kind of purplish-green with spots of red. He had one arm up pointing at us, and his hand was shaking like an old car on a corduroy road.

"Now, wait a minute—" I said.

"Get going," he said. "Of all the damned foolishness I ever heard of, this takes the plush-lined beer-mug. I told you to get that dog out of here. I'll get her out of here so she'll never come back." He slammed out of the door. He turned and stuck his head back in. "Quincy," he yowled, "you've disobeyed orders once too often." And he was gone.

"He's liable to hurt Pete," Jack said. "We'd better get down there."

"If he so much as touches a hair on that dog, I'm through," I said.

"Me too," said Jack.

I don't know why I ran; after all, a dog's a dog; but I was scared. I ran down through the shop, following the long-legged hillbilly. I noticed that quite a few machines were standing

idle, and I thought I'd have to raise a little hell about that. People just can't leave their jobs over the least little thing. But they had evidently gone to see the boss get rid of the dog.

QUITE a mob had gathered around Pete's box when we got there. Jack pushed his way through the crowd, and I followed him. We walked up to the box. The old man was standing over the box, just saying: "Well, I'll be darned."

Jack peeked in and said: "Well, I'll be darned."

I looked and I said: "Well, I'll be darned."

Pete had had her puppies. There were five of them, and they were all little devils of different colors, cute as a bug's ear: squirming, wriggling, and gnawing in the bottom of the box. Their eyes were still closed, and then I noticed a peculiar thing. The boss noticed it too. Every last one of those pups had the same markings on its head as the mother: two white stripes that ran from either ear down to a point between the eyes. By stretching the imagination, like seeing things formed by white clouds in a blue sky, it looked as though each one of the pups was marked with a V on its forehead.

"Look at the little devils," the boss said, "look at their heads."

Pete was proud of her family, and she was enjoying showing them off. She licked each one with a long, red tongue.

"Yeah," I said, "a white V on their foreheads." I turned to the boys who were standing around. "It's an omen," I said in my fruitiest voice. I hoped they were superstitious. "Pete has produced ahead of schedule for victory." The boys laughed.

I have seen a laugh break a job more than once, when everything else has failed, and I had the feeling that the boys were impressed too. They went back to work with a vengeance. They moved the machine into the line in record time, and had the job set up and turning out production by the time the day-shift gang came to work. Pete was responsible for it all, because the fellows, while they may not have been superstitious, and probably didn't believe in omens, weren't taking any chances, just in case.

And the old man! He was the surprise. He nudged my elbow when we were looking at the puppies. "Say, Cass," he said, "who do I have to see to get one of those pups? I think my wife'd like one." His wife, my eye!

Well, Pete had delivered in time, and I knew that we would too. Now, I'm not superstitious, and I don't believe in such things as omens, but then the way I figure it is: Who can prove that it *wasn't* an omen?



A TIME for GREATNESS

II—The Significance of our Striving

by Herbert Agar

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IF a man is to strive with all his heart, the significance of his striving must be unmistakable. The significance of the ashes of the village must be as telling as the significance of the village itself. But the ashes of our villages are meaningless. Our dead die in a charade."

Saint-Exupéry's words on the agony of France may apply one day to the agony of America if we do not make "the significance of our striving unmistakable." Our war lacks grandeur and focus because it lacks clear meaning. We have not yet taught ourselves the exact reason for the catastrophe. Yet this is part of the price of victory.

There are three ways to fight this war. One is the totalitarian system. The order is given from on top. The people are told to go to war, all out, as a united community. If they don't go to war they go to jail, so every man, woman and child goes to war. There is little time lag, little waste motion.

The second way to fight the war is the way which the democracies prefer. It is known as "too little and too late." The essence of the system is a gigantic effort to eat your cake and have it too, to defeat a world in arms while dislocating normal life as little as possible. "Let us by all means beat our enemies," say the proponents of the system. "But meanwhile let us have

business as usual, Roosevelt-hating as usual, labor-baiting as usual, anti-semitism as usual, and (in the case of several of our largest daily newspapers) isolationism as usual."

The system has an undeniable appeal. The drawback is that it always fails.

The third way to fight the war has not yet been attempted; but America has often prided herself on doing the unusual, so perhaps we shall be willing to try it. The third way is for a free people to go all out, as a united community, before they find themselves being murdered. The British became united in war at the time when it looked as if they were about to become united in the graveyard. The French never became united in war. Most of our other allies (aside from China and Russia) began fight-

ing after they were officially dead. In a sense this is even true of Poland, which was prepared to go all out from the beginning, but which had been sacrificed before the fighting began by the crime of March 7th, 1936.

What about the United States? We do not want to fight the war as totalitarians, and we do not want to fight the war as failures. Have we the discipline and the daring to be the first free people to lift ourselves in time to a knowledge of what the war is about, and thus to a national unity based on knowledge, which is permanent, rather than on anger, which wears off? The slack civilian America of today is a long way from such discipline. Yet the desire is in our hearts. And the tradition of doing tough jobs for ourselves, rather than waiting to have them done for us, is still strong in our land. Here is a tough job that no one can do for us. Unless we get together, community by community, and teach ourselves why we are fighting this war, we too shall wait until we are almost dead before the whole American people put their hearts into the effort all day long.

Here is the challenge that fate has flung at us: must we wait until hell is on the doorstep before we wake up and go to war with a unity comparable to that of a coerced totalitarian

Lt. Commander Agar, who wrote this challenging book, has been loaned by the Navy to our State Department, and is now special assistant to Ambassador John G. Winant in London. He saw service in the first World War, has been a newspaper editor and is the author of other books such as his Pulitzer Prize winner "Land of the Free."

state? Must we continue distrusting our government, making trouble among our economic groups, wasting our irreplaceable resources on luxury as usual, condoning the sedition of some of our leading citizens, until the bombs fall in the next street, until our friends die in their houses and we watch our home towns burning against a dawn sky? When that time comes we shall doubtless make a fine showing. But it may be too late.

Nothing but knowledge, nothing but hard-won self-education, can save us from the agony of the other free peoples: the agony of needless defeats. If we pretend we are at war merely because the Japanese attacked us at Pearl Harbor we are depriving the greatest of human tragedies of all its meaning.

Pearl Harbor is the last of a series of events which prove that life still makes sense. We are at war primarily because of a sickness in our civilization that made all these events necessary. If we deny that primary fact we turn our Shakespearean tragedy into a comedy of errors.

We are not at war because of Pearl Harbor, and we are not at war because of Hitler. Hitler is an effect, not a cause. To blame the war on Hitler is to turn our tragedy into a Broadway farce. It is to rewrite the last act of *Hamlet* and to make the Prince die by slipping on a banana peel.

ALL farces, and most comedies, are plays in which the plot depends on accidents. If a man gets into the wrong apartment by mistake the results may be funny; but they do not follow because of anything in the man's character. They are as accidental as the results of tripping on a loose carpet. But a tragedy is a play in which things happen for clear reasons. Because a man has led a certain life, made for himself certain habits and traits, he behaves in a certain way. The play shows that he cannot escape from his past, that there is such a thing as cause and effect, that life has meaning. *Hamlet* died—as *Macbeth* and *Lear* and *Antony* died—because the seeds of death were in his character. Our world is in danger of dying for the same reason. Civilization has not taken a fall because it stepped on something slimy. But something slimy was present, because civilization was getting soft spots. The war is a tragedy in the strict dramatic sense of the word. It has come upon our world because our world behaved in a certain way, acquired certain habits. It is a tragedy of character. This does not imply that it must have a bad ending. There is nothing in a tragedy of char-

acter that requires the death of the hero.

Obviously, we did enter the war because Japan attacked us at Pearl Harbor. But if we think this immediate defense of our immediate interests is the real cause of the war, we do not understand our world profoundly enough to make the effort . . . needed to beat our enemies and to ensure that victory is worth the price.

It is said that in America there are now eighty-nine committees, groups and other agencies at work discussing and studying the problems of the post-war world. That is good; but it seems a pity that there are not more agencies discussing why the war is taking place: not what are we fighting for, not what a fine world we plan in case we win, but why the war had to happen. It is always hard to predict or to pre-plan the institutions of the future. But one way to influence the future for the better is to see clearly the mistakes of the past and to try to avoid them. A knowledge of the meaning of the war will not only help us to fight; it will also help us to make fighting worth while.

The war is the military phase of a world-wide revolt against civilization. The revolt was possible because of a world-wide disintegration of civilization. The revolt and the disintegration long preceded the war, and will continue long after it unless we renew the roots of our life while beating the men who have taken up arms against us. The two jobs are in fact one job, and it is doubtful whether either can be accomplished alone. Even if our enemies were to grow tired and to lay down their arms we should only win a brief respite. The war must begin again—must always begin again until our world is dead—unless we define the causes of our failure and insist that the causes be abolished. This is only to say what Raoul de Sales has said in *The Making of Tomorrow*: "That a certain familiar world had died forever in 1914 and that no new world had been born in 1919 was not apparent until Hitler came to demonstrate the reality of the vacuum in which we have lived for the last twenty years."

If we merely beat Hitler and his allies, the vacuum will still be there and it will still be abhorrent. If we do not fill it with something good it will certainly be filled with something evil; so the cycle begins again. And the next time, whether we win or lose the military phase of the revolt against civilization, we are almost certain to lose civilization itself.

What is civilization? We have said that it is a set of rules by which most

men abide, of promises to which most men adhere. It is also a set of institutions, of homely customs, which express the experience of centuries. It has its roots in cultural disciplines, religious and humanistic, which give life its meaning. Man creates these disciplines, and supports them, to foster what is good in his nature and control what is bad. When he begins to break his own rules and ignore his customs, instead of making them ever more subtle and humane with the passing decades, civilization sickens at the roots.

IF a civilization such as ours (which professes respect for the individual man) is to endure, it obviously cannot become the monopoly of an elite. It must become so far as possible the common enterprise of all. The purpose of our society is not for the few men of maximum strength and ambition to lead lives of Byzantine glory, but for all men to make the most of their common humanity. We are pledged to a general diffusion of culture, of independence and self-respect and the means to a good life.

There has been a loss of faith in our intention to live up to this pledge. The loss of faith cannot be cured simply by an improvement in the standards of living. A hundred and fifty years of rising standards of living left millions of citizens of our Western world in a mood of despair and defeatism which made possible the rise of the Axis attack on life. These millions who have lost faith are recruited from every economic class. . . . As Peter Drucker says, "Any society which cannot prevent the development of masses is irrevocably doomed."

The word "masses" suggests a class of distinction; but in a disintegrating civilization a new kind of masses comes into being, a group which does not belong to any one social or economic class. It consists of all those who no longer participate in the creative life and thought of the community: all the cynical, all the hopeless, all the angry, all the frightened. These are the frustrated men and women who no longer can, or no longer will, take part in the work of carrying forward a civilization. They are always present. An increase in their numbers is the first warning that the world is losing its health. A great increase in their numbers means that civilization has become vulnerable to the disease of fascism. It means that because of our partial failure to be true to our promises and our traditions, the old barbarian has come back into the world, ready as ever to destroy, unable as ever to create. . . .

What is barbarism? Its results are always the same, though its nature is dual. It always ends in a belief in

power for power's sake, which implies the destruction of an ordered society. It always, therefore, derides rules and promises—for if power is the end, and if power can be won by breaking rules and promises, why not break them? For the same reason barbarism always destroys institutions. The church or the family, for instance, cannot exist unless each has its own area of authority. But the barbarian, seeking power unlimited, can admit no rule but his own. This means that he must rule by terror. There is no alternative to the rule of law, customs, promises, and self-discipline, except the rule of terror. There is no alternative to authority except naked force. There is no alternative to legitimate power, which is accepted because the community believes it reflects the moral law, except power for power's sake, which is accepted because it is backed with bayonets and machine guns.

There are two forms of barbarism, both deadly. One is the passive barbarism, the negative corruption that arises within a civilization that is going soft. The other is the active barbarism that menaces a civilization with violence. This may be a positive form of corruption, a dynamic vice—as it is with the Axis today. Or it may be the barbarism of the youth of the world—as in the case of the fall of Rome. . . .

Whether active or passive, whether the accompaniment of old age or of childhood, barbarism is the eternal enemy. The minute the forces of a civilization begin to relax the barbarian again enters the pages of history. And whatever the trappings of the story he is always the same barbarian. We are so accustomed to thinking of him as a man riding an ox cart, or at best a horse, that we find it hard to see him as a man riding a Mercedes. But the machine does not civilize the machine user.

Unhappily, we do not need to go to Germany, and to the little man in the six-wheeled automobile, to find a barbarian. In one form or another he lives in the heart of every man, ready to help demolish a world that has lost faith in itself. We can find him, therefore, in every community, rich or poor, where that faith is waning. We can find him described with accurate horror in much of our modern literature. . . .

We shall never understand this civil war of all the globe if we think the threatened collapse of civilization, and hence the revolt against civilization, is confined to the enemy countries. It is the enemy who has undertaken to carry out the sacrilegious murder of man's hopes; but those hopes are doomed to die in any case unless we do more than beat the enemy on the field.

Hitler in his Mercedes should remind us that although one of the fruits of civilization is technology it is a mistake to measure the health of a social order merely by the extent or the progress of its technology. A high technology need not be a healthy sign; it may flourish after the moral stability of a society has begun to break, after the civilization has begun to sicken. But not for long—only until the resurgent barbarian misappropriates the tools and kills the world which invented them. Thereafter, under the rule of power for power's sake, under the terror and the secret police, man starts once more down the long hill toward the technics of an Indian village. Under such a rule science becomes sterile, technology decays. Man endures, but does not accept, the lot imposed upon him. Only the use of his free will can make man's mind creative. In a time of barbarism man breeds and suffers and waits—until a new civilization rises from the rubble to which the barbarian has reduced the old.

It is well to remember that there has so far been no exception to this rule. The Axis today talks about a "new order." Some of its leaders may believe that if they conquer the world they can run it. But the experience of life is against them. They do not exercise authority. They do not govern in the name of principles which man accepts even though he may sometimes violate them. They exercise only tyranny. They rule only in the name of power, which brutalizes the ruled and the rulers alike. And it is not possible for them to reform. They must continue to rule only in the name of power. As they conquer the world they are tearing up the roots of the only civilization that exists. When their work is done, when the last resistance is stamped out, they cannot replant that violated flower. And they cannot conjure a new civilization out of thin air. A civilization cannot be invented merely because the unclean chaos of barbarism shows that one is needed. A civilization is a slow accretion, as gradual in its beginnings as the creation of a new soil on a burned mountainside. If we lose the civilization we now possess, the world is unlikely to see another for Hitler's thousand years.

The gangster who has wiped out the neighbor gang cannot settle down to respectability. He is outside that quiet world forever. He must continue in his course, killing and killing until at last he is himself killed. The barbarians who wipe out a civilization cannot suddenly sit down and live gracefully in the world they have de-

stroyed. The promises have all been broken; the rules have all been made ridiculous. There is no principle left by which to govern; there is only irresponsible force; jealous soldier-emperors preying on each other, seizing each other's provinces, killing each other's slaves, driving the world ever closer to collapse. When would one of them find time to pause and construct a New Order? What sanctions would he find for his Order? On what principles would he erect it, since his own triumph must have meant that all the men who cared enough about principles to defend them were already either dead or in jail? . . .

How did it happen that we have come so close to such a final disaster? Not long ago it would have been impossible to persuade our comfortable solid-seeming world that there were such rocks ahead of us. (Even today it is impossible to persuade many people. They cling to the myth that there is nothing wrong with our world except a "war" that was "started" by Germany or by Japan—the implication being that if we win the war, or even negotiate a not-too-onerous peace, we have solved our problem.) Perhaps it was the comfort, the long comfort for so many people, that betrayed us into forgetting what a dangerous planet we inhabit, how light the crust on which we walk in security, how terrible the fires beneath if we let the crust break.

FOR almost a hundred years our world was rich, proud, increasingly comfortable. It felt strong, and we grew to think it was healthy. Yet toward the end the signs of ill health were all about us—the same warning signs that had appeared many times before when other civilizations were at the height of their physical powers. During the blatant twenties the Western world was growing increasingly nihilistic. More and more millions of people were coming to feel that the promises on which society rests were not binding promises—at least not for them. The test for any scheme was becoming whether it would "work," whether a man could get away with it, not whether it was in accord with the principles on which our ordered world rested. The feeling became more and more widespread that "practical self-interest" was the only interest that a reasonable man would admit. But "practical self-interest," as the sole basis for judgment, is perilously close to the concept of naked force. It is already a half-barbarous idea. In popular language the idea was expressed in the phrase "anything goes."

And it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in a world where anything goes everything will soon be gone.

In such a world it is natural to find Nazi imperialism arrayed against a softer form of national egotism: the irresponsible nationalism which refuses to do its duty by the community of nations. Both forms of selfishness are destructive of civilization. Both deny the principles on which our world rests. Both say by implication that practical self-interest is the only interest which a nation need consult. Again we find the lazy corruption and the aggressive corruption (the soft barbarism of decay and the dynamic barbarism of plunder) combining to produce disaster. When the soft barbarism creates the opportunity, there will always be found a dynamic barbarism to seize it.

IN the course of the League of Nations debates, Woodrow Wilson said that if the American nation went back on its pledged word, betraying its honor, the United States would help to break the heart of mankind. At the time, these truthful words were taken to be the sentimental language of an ex-professor who had not learned the facts of life. The thought that the human race may have a heart which can be broken, may have hopes which if too long deferred will fester and turn into despair, seemed wholly bizarre to that postwar world. It was a thought which could scarcely be entertained without imposing upon that world the need for self-discipline and reformation. And men were already retreating from hard facts, such as morals and principles, and giving themselves to airy fantasies, such as "permanent prosperity."

The thought that it did no harm for a great nation to break its word, so long as the great nation continued to grow more rich, was not a thought which would appeal to a student of history. Although history shows endless examples of such treachery, it does not show that the treachery bears good fruit. But the postwar world disposed of the verdict of history by rewriting it in terms of economic determinism and debunking—a form of intellectual backwardness which again was unhealthy.

One of the by-products of this backwardness was the belief, repeated by professors and journalists until it became a major confusion in the American mind, that "war settles nothing." It is ironic that Americans should have been beguiled by such a theory, because war has settled so much throughout our brief history. War gave us the chance to leave the Brit-

ish Empire; we took the chance and made use of it. War gave us the chance to acquire a portion of the Mexican Empire; we took the chance and made use of it. War gave the North the chance to erase the slave civilization of the South and to impose the banking and the tariff system that suited the new industrialism; the North took the chance and made use of it. War gave us the chance in 1918 to work for a better world; we neglected the chance and made no use of it. The record does not prove that war settles nothing. It proves that war settles exactly what it is intended to settle: it settles who is to have charge of the immediate future.

The war-won opportunity is often thrown away, for war does not turn bad men into good. Virtue cannot be conquered on the battlefield and carted home like the enslaved women of Troy. Nobody ever pretended that by winning a war we could make the world safe for democracy. But by winning the war, instead of losing it, we did earn a chance to make the world safe for democracy. Our selfishness and our shortsightedness prevented us from taking the chance. But our conscience was uneasy, so we tried to justify our sin against life by pretending that the war was a mistake in the first place. We thus added foolishness to the list of our offenses—a foolishness which helped to prevent us from seeing our duty in the present war, until it exploded under our noses.

It is not a far cry from the revolt against our national honor, implicit in the great betrayal of 1919, to the slack world of press agents and advertising men who set moral standards for an increasing number of people during the twenties and the thirties. We have seen that when the faith in material progress as an end in itself began to die the crisis in modern history was upon us. Had we reinterpreted the great tradition of the free Western world, reproclaimed the principles on which it rests, we might have filled the spiritual vacuum with something noble. We did not do so. As a result the vacuum was filled with something malign—with the rising vogue of Nazism. But millions who were not prepared to accept this life-denying creed, and who were not prepared to re-examine their own true creed and to refurbish it, turned unconsciously to the advertising man and to the press agent for assurance that our unhealthy world was sound. Louder and louder, as society drew closer to the brink of our present hell, came the story of the perfection of America, the perfection of business,

the perfection of our standard of living (which nevertheless had to grow more and more perfect with each new model). It was assumed that because advertising, with a sufficient expenditure of cash, could induce the public to buy one toothpaste rather than another, it could fill the empty places of the heart with glee, or satisfy a soul that was pursued by the Hound of Heaven. . . .

"The web of history is woven without a void." What a civilization can do tomorrow depends on what it is doing today and what its ancestors did yesterday. If a large part of the world is content to be silly today, and to justify its folly by denying the greatness of yesterday, the web of history is wearing dangerously thin. If the web breaks, civilization breaks. If the rules and customs, the institutions and disciplines, on which civilization rests are disregarded, the result cannot be the sudden substitution of a new civilization for the old. The result can only be collapse and a Dark Age: a half-ruined, half-starved world, depopulated and cruel, in which men fight like animals for the meager goods which are never enough to go around.

WHEN the continuity of life is lost, all is lost; that is the primary fact which we must face. Such a break with the past is the most fearful of the calamities that can fall upon man. There is no reason to believe it would be less devastating in its results today than it was the last time it occurred in Western Europe: between the fifth and the eleventh centuries.

The central danger to our world is that the barbarians will cut the web of history. The central task of our world is to preserve it. This is a conservative task which we must perform whether or not we like to be called conservatives. Democracy has become the one effective conservative force in the world; and we are its guardians. As Raoul de Sales writes:—

"It should not be forgotten that the real opposition to Hitlerism is not to be found either in Bolshevism, capitalism, socialism, or in the Jews. There is only one real peril for Hitler: democracy, and the principles upon which it is founded. If he can destroy that, he destroys all the rest. This word—so derided by some today, so meaningless to others—contains nevertheless the essential idea of continuity and evolution, of progress and permanence, without which there can be no civilization."

It is a serious, perhaps a fatal, mistake to believe that a desirable future can be built on anything except on the foundations prepared by the present and the past. If the foundations are inadequate they can be extended.

If in parts they are crumbling, the parts can be rebuilt or discarded. But if the foundations are scrapped, continuity is scrapped, and with it civilization. The denial of this truth is the great Marxian heresy, and it has been taken over completely by the Nazi mythology of a New Order. In fact there can never be a new order except that which is a development of the old. When the old is destroyed root and branch, as it is being destroyed by the Axis today, all that can ensue is catastrophe. The same proposition can be stated in moral terms: a people who disregard the continuity of history, who dishonor their ancestors and boast of living trivially, are doomed to become impotent.

Here again we find the contrast between the dynamic barbarism of the Axis, seeking to slaughter the world in head-on combat, and the softer barbarism which had begun to overspread our own negligent minds. The Nazis achieved a coerced unity of purpose within the nation, which they used as an instrument of anarchy between the nations. We, meanwhile, allowed our democratic liberties to decline toward an anarchy of private and class interests. Hitler exploited this inner weakness of the democracies as shrewdly as he made use of the indifference of each nation for the welfare of all. He knew that we were permitting our boasted freedom to degenerate, not only into moral anarchy, but into physical injustice as well.

While the advertising men were boasting about the number of our bathtubs and our automobiles, millions of Americans were experiencing insecurity and fear, and hence a mounting discontent. The factory workers of New England, for example, were entering on a long night of growing unemployment. The economists might call it "transitional unemployment" and might prove that it was necessary and that it should not be criticized. Yet the men who were unemployed continued to criticize.

The nomadic share croppers of the South and the rootless tenant farmers, and the migratory farm hands who wander desolately with the seasons from Texas to Montana and back again—these victims of our careless world were made more bitter, more nihilistic, by the rising tide of self-congratulation with which the advertising men flooded our country. Again we suffered from the evil that follows on too much boasting, too little performance. Actually the nation was growing more prosperous. Actually we were approaching the time when there could be a modest sufficiency to go around. But instead of seeing to it that the modest sufficiency came closer and closer to going around, we salved our easy consciences by pretending

that everyone was wealthy, or was about to become wealthy, or could become wealthy if he had the proper ambition. Thus it came to pass that a world of increasing wealth bred an increasing bitterness in its areas of poverty.

Our treatment of the Negro problem in America is another example of our world's failure to maintain its faith in itself. This is a grievous problem, admitting of no quick solution. But we owe it to our moral dignity to face the problem with steady seriousness and to do each day what is possible on that day—and every step forward brings another step forward within the realm of possibility.

Behind the Negro problem, as has recently been made clear to the most unwilling minds, there looms the vast problem of the colored races throughout the world—a problem which contains within itself the problem of the survival of our democratic faith. If we consider this race problem as a symbol of man's self-betrayal everywhere, it will help us to understand the world revolt of today. It will also help us to understand the heights to which we must lift ourselves, if we are to save ourselves. For the white man can no longer afford his prejudice on the colored question. It has always been immoral; it has now become suicidal as well.

We can lose this war, or make victory vain, if we fail to convince our colored allies—our most numerous allies—that the white man is ready at last to lay down his "burden" and to think in terms of a single human race working together to make a fit habitation out of this globe. If we were to lose Asia we should probably lose the war. And we are likely to lose Asia unless we reform our attitude toward other races, and express the reformation in physical acts for all men to see. "If we plan to win in Asia," writes Lin Yutang, "we must make the war in Asia a popular war for the Asiatics." A good way to make it popular would be to prove that the heirs to Christianity and to democracy are not just another *Herrenvolk*, feeling superior to all races but their own.

THE Japanese are making great and successful use of every sign of racial prejudice in America. Unhappily they do not have to invent such signs. One day we give them a lynching in Missouri; the next day we give them a refusal to allow Chinese sailors to come ashore on furlough in American ports. It will be a bad day for us if the colored races of the world grow tired of fighting on the side of allies

who look down on them and maltreat them. Again we see the barbarian within us serving as the secret weapon of the barbarian without.

We can no longer think in terms of what we are willing to "do" for the colored peoples of the world. That is not the question. We must force ourselves to understand that the question is whether we can join the human race in time, while the white man still has the chance to be treated as an equal in a world where the people of his color are a small minority. If the army of civilization beats the Axis armies of barbarism, we shall have a second chance to help build a world in which men of all colors recognize their brotherhood. We shall have a selfish as well as a religious motive for helping to build such a world. For the alternative will be a world in which minorities are savaged. And we are one of the minorities.

After a survey of the East made just before Pearl Harbor, Hallett Abend wrote that while the Japanese Nationalists hate the Japanese they have no intention of living after the war in a world where the old color lines are permitted. "Count us up and think it over," they said to Mr. Abend. "There are 450,000,000 Chinese; 340,000,000 natives in India; in Thailand and Indo-China are another 32,000,000 people; Burma and Malaya have more than 20,000,000; we in the Indies are 70,000,000, the Japanese are 70,000,000, and the Koreans nearly 25,000,000 more. . . . If we are betrayed by the eventual peace, then some Asiatic nation will arise as a genuine and unselfish emancipator, and the ensuing conflict will make the present war seem like only an amateurish rehearsal." At the end of such a war the white man would find himself in the Jim Crow seats. . . .

The war, we have said, is the military phase of a world revolt against civilization. Why did the revolt head up in Germany? Why have all the inner revolts against the civilization of the West, for the last two thousand years, headed up in Germany? The question is one of the most obscure in human history; but a few partial answers can be suggested.

In the first place the Germans have been from the beginning outside of one of the main streams of Western civilization—the influence of the Mediterranean world which has done so much to help the rest of us to suppress the inner barbarian. It does not seem to have done much for Mussolini; nevertheless, Italian fascist barbarism would never have threatened to drag down our world if it had not been taken over by the far more dead-

ly and aggressive barbarism of the north.

It is no wartime exaggeration to say with Hamilton Fish Armstrong that "Nazi behavior is not a flash in the German pan but the reflex of an old strain of endemic barbarism, methodically kept alive and developed. . . . There is a strange German world of mystification where, if we are able to enter at all, we find ourselves groping and bemused. . . . Since things have no clear intellectual basis they can have no issue except reckless and violent action or dreams of action that result from frustration and end in perversion and self-abasement. . . . So goes the hateful ring, from the Nibelungen world of mists and scaly dragons and horns of mead to the beer halls of Munich and the bloody mud of the Ukraine, and back again."

YET this Germany of mists and scaly dragons contrived between 1870 and 1914 an industrial development which in view of her resources was the most remarkable technical achievement of the modern world. Sentimental and brutal, romantic and efficient, Germany has always been a perplexing combination of suburban businessman and blood-hungry savage. Raoul de Sales points out that the romanticism which was hardly more important than a transient literary mood in the rest of our world has become one of the main themes in German life. All men have two souls, in the sense of intense strivings toward good and toward evil; but it is only the romantic who feels he has permission to indulge both souls to the utmost. All nations, likewise, have two souls: one civilized and one barbarian. It is only the German nation which has taught itself for generations that the barbarian soul, instead of being a destroyer, is a regenerator—that civilization is a form of decadence that must be renewed from time to time by brutal exaltations and by blood baths. It is Byron crying to the thunderstorm, praying to be

A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,
A portion of the tempest and of thee.

That is all very well for a solitary poet on Lake Geneva. But when a nation of eighty million people becomes "a portion of the tempest" the resultant frenzy is enough to pull down the pillars of our world.

It cannot be argued that the German is necessarily inferior to other people, or more savage than his neighbors. When the German is transplanted to the American Middle West he becomes a normal human being who does not feel it necessary from

time to time to refresh the civilization of Indiana in the blood of its unhappy sons and daughters. But it can be argued that the German national tradition is inferior, grossly and iniquitously inferior, to that of any other people in the modern world.

"The truth is," writes Raoul de Sales, "that whereas the individual Britisher or American—whether he is a decent citizen or not—belongs to an order of society which openly and constantly recommends law, moral discipline, tolerance, order and other civilized virtues, the German unfortunately has been submitted for centuries to a series of influences which have taught him that the great mission of the Teutonic people is to overthrow the Western world, to rid themselves of its moral discipline, of its rationalism, and of its concept that there is a law above men.

"This has been going on, under one form or another, since the Romans had to erect Maginot Lines against the hordes of the East. And unfortunately, the modern German is far from being on the mend as compared with his ancestor of the time of Arminius. Quite the contrary. Back of him there is now over one hundred years of romantic and militaristic education; one hundred years of Pan-Germanic propaganda and barbaric exaltation."

And this Germany, where the barbarian is closer to the surface than in the rest of our world, where the romantic conflict of the "divided soul" is regarded as something to cherish rather than something to suppress, lies at one of the centers of the world's economic and racial tensions; in the heart of Europe. Perhaps this is why German politics have been dominated since the Reformation by conceptions of government which reveal an almost morbid fear of anarchy, and which consequently demand uncritical obedience to authority. For centuries Germany has lived on the edge of tyranny. The middle classes, instead of working for a bourgeois conception of freedom, remained accomplices of the feudal-military caste. Not even the Weimar Republic finally broke the power of this caste; and the Nazi revolution made an alliance between the military aristocracy and the confused and resentful lower middle classes.

Perhaps there is also a relation between Germany's geographical position and the long delusion of the German people that they have a special right to trample upon their neighbors. Fichte was only repeating this ancient belief when he wrote, in 1808: "Though military force must be its instrument, it [the German civilization]

would prevail because of its own intrinsic superiority over all other forms of civilization. This superiority exists independently of the military weapon which insures its triumph. It is rooted in the eternal order." This recalls the comment we have quoted from Gauleiter Wagner: "Anything which benefits the German people is right; anything which harms the German people is wrong." It recalls von Bülow's comment, long before the last war, "To the hypocritical French slogan of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, we oppose our Prussian realities of Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery."

All nations, of course, have produced men capable of writing such nonsense. But Germany has gone further: she has produced men capable of reading and believing it. These are the men who inhabit that "strange German world of mystification," and who have made it easy for Hitler to deprive Nazi youth of all knowledge of the existence of a moral law other than the Fuehrer's will.

We must not forget that when a great many people of importance write and speak nonsense they can produce a deep effect upon the mind and soul of a nation. It is true that a careful selection of passages from books and speeches can make any nation sound like a group of brutal bullies. Such a selection is always a part of the enemy's wartime propaganda. But we must not assume, therefore, that such a selection always falsifies the facts. Whether the selection gives a true impression or a false depends upon the influence of the people who have made the brutal remarks. In Germany these people have been leading scholars, statesmen, soldiers. They have been speaking in the same savage key for centuries. Their effect has been immense.

WHATEVER may be the explanation for all these unhappy German traits, the traits remain. Anyone who had observed them would have been able to predict that if our world grew sick and distrustful the revolt against civilization would be led by Germany.

Almost every man has some part of his body which is especially weak. When one man is under the weather, he has throat trouble; another man may have stomach trouble. When our civilization is under the weather, it has German trouble. This explanation does not excuse Germany; neither does it seek to blame a world malaise upon the neurosis or the brutality of a single people. The barbarian revolt would be less deadly, less rapid, perhaps less cruel, if there were no Germany—but the revolt would be taking place in any event. Let us not forget Huey Long, who proved that the rise of a man who sought power

for power's sake was possible during the 1920's in our own country.

We can explain our war against some such background of meaning, of cause and effect, as is here presented. We can explain it nobly, as one of the tragic challenging moments when man can only save his world by exerting both body and imagination to the utmost. At such a time all but the most frivolous are willing to think in large terms. At such a time reforms that might take generations in days of peace may come to pass overnight. The Chicago of Algren's novel, the race prejudice in all our hearts, the exaggerated materialism that makes us put means before ends—all might be ameliorated quickly if we saw the war in its full seriousness. . . .

The real meaning of the war, if we dare to face it, makes life clear. We see why the war happened. We see what we must do to make the winning of it possible, or even worth while. Seeing these things we can lift ourselves to say, as Saint-Exupéry said after the fall of France, "I shall fight for Man. Against Man's enemies—but against myself as well." There is no other way to win a revolt against a civilization. . . .

There are still Americans who say that if the price of beating Hitler is to treat men of other races like equals they would rather be on the side of Hitler. But they would not say this if they knew what it means to be on the side of Hitler, if they knew that when a barbarian kills a world he can put nothing but chaos in its place. All our weaknesses, all our division, can be made manageable for the time being, if we take the trouble to understand the war in its majesty and dignity. Even the problem of our relations with our white allies would be made much easier. For example, there are two questions most commonly asked about Russia by those who seem not unwilling to weaken America's war effort. Neither question would disturb us if we understood the war.

The first question is, "Why should we, who dislike communism, help a communist state?" The folly of the question can be suggested by turning it backwards. Suppose a Russian were to ask, "Why should we, who dislike capitalism, fight on the same side as the United States?" If the questioner were not shot as a saboteur he would certainly be jailed as a lunatic.

The answer is easy for a Russian. The German armies have been battering at Russia's vital cities and supplies. A huge area of Russian soil has been taken and plundered. A huge number of Russian citizens have been savaged and murdered.

It does not take much insight on the part of a Russian to know that Russia is in mortal danger. She is therefore

ten times happy to fight on the side of any nation which is warring against Hitler. She does not inquire too sensitively into the social or economic credentials of people who are helping to kill Nazis.

America is also in mortal danger. Our peril is as acute as that of Russia; but it is not as obvious as that of Russia. We must know the meaning of the war before we know the awful stakes and the immediacy of the threat. Since lots of Americans have not yet learned the meaning of the war, lots of Americans still regard it as a kind of club into which they will admit only such people as would make suitable husbands for their daughters.

THERE is no time to wait until we too have our millions of dead, our burnt towns, our broken countryside; we must learn at once that the war means all or nothing for the whole human race. We are not playing for marbles. We are in a tug of war in which the price of defeat is to be murdered. . . .

The second question, equally irrelevant, is this: "If Russia has a large part in winning the war, may she not dominate the peace, and thus the world of tomorrow?" To this there is a simple answer: If our side wins, Russia will only "dominate" the peace in case the United States has failed to understand the nature of the war she has helped to win.

If we think it is merely a struggle for power, if therefore we come home after the war, and creep into bed, and persuade ourselves that the fate of man is not our concern, we shall not only have little influence ourselves but we shall have done our best to destroy the influence of free men everywhere. If the richest and most fortunate of the democracies behaves like a cranky child, the prestige of freedom as an

institution will be diminished. To whatever extent it is diminished, the prestige of Russia will be increased. But the Soviet Union cannot construct a new world out of its own physical and moral resources. If we take the attitude that we took after the last war, we shall merely insure that the war must begin again. . . .

If our side wins there will be four great centers of power and of ideas in the postwar world: Russia, China, the British Empire, and the United States. Three of the four are committed to the democratic idea. If that idea is as good as we think it is, and if we serve it faithfully, it has nothing to fear from an opposing idea. It seems more reasonable for Russians to fear the "domination" of the democratic dogma than for democrats to fear that an inferior idea, backed by inferior force, will suddenly drive us off the map.

We cannot win the war at all without rising above the national irresponsibility which has given Hitler his advantage over us. The forms of mutual accord and accommodation, without which victory is impossible, must become the groundwork for a community of nations, without which the technical interdependence of our age has become insufferable. And it is not wishful thinking to talk of a "community of nations" if we have once seen clearly the terrible cost of refusing to think in these large terms.

Similarly, we cannot win the war at all without promoting justice within our nation and giving freedom new meaning by relating it to community responsibility. To win the war, therefore, means not only to overcome the virulent corruption which has assailed us from without, but to be healed of the weakness and folly which has betrayed us from within; it means to bring a technical civilization under the domination of brotherhood, thus harnessing our resources for creative tasks. Such changes have seemed impossible in the past because they have seemed unnecessary. When we see that they are the simple cost of survival we shall be able to accomplish reforms which yesterday would have been beyond the reach of our complacency.

For once, the truth is good news. An understanding of the meaning of the war reminds us that in the midst of confusion and defeat life still makes sense. If we understand in time, we can save our world. There is reason to history, and hence there is hope. Our men are dying in a great inevitable tragedy that can be turned into a victory. They are not dying in an accident. . . . in a charade.

(To be continued)

"A Time for Greatness," by Herbert Agar

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 50

S	E	C	R	E	T	E	M	A	S	S	E	S
E	N	R	O	B	E	D	S	A	P	J	E	N
S	T	U	B	B	E	D	I	T	E	R	A	T
A	R	E	S	N	I	P	P	E	D	S	H	E
M	A	L	T	Y	E	L	P	S	P	O	U	R
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R	E	I	K	I	N	E	T	I	C	F	I	G
E	N	D	W	I	S	E	E	V	O	K	I	N
S	T	E	E	P	E	D	M	A	T	T	E	E
A	S	S	E	S	S		S	L	E	D	G	E

FIRE Drake

CHAPTER TWO

THE work of a destroyer attendant upon an aircraft carrier differs in detail from that of the normal Fleet destroyers. An aircraft carrier has more elaborate needs.

At dawn she must turn—bows into the wind—to fly off her reconnaissance patrol, her anti-submarine planes, her fighters if there is reason to suspect the possibility of enemy attack. At dusk she must turn to the wind again to take the last of them once more on to the broad level of her flight deck.

Between those times she has to manoeuvre in obedience to the wind whenever patrols complete their routine, or reinforcements of fighters need to be flown off or new pilots require flying practice. There is a constant changing of formation, a constant alteration from the line of course.

Firedrake and her fellows took their swift part in these manoeuvres. With her fellow destroyers she took her turn in falling back as crash boat in case a plane met disaster at flying off or flying on.

They worked by slow degrees down to the northwest of Ireland, to that area two hundred miles or so west of the still Islands of the Hebrides where in the dusk of the first Sunday evening of the war the Donaldson liner, *Athenia*, was torpedoed—and the Germans, giving no warning, making no provision for the safety of passengers and crew, despite their sworn promise, committed the first act of piracy in this new war.

The weather was calm and clear, with the long easy roll of the Atlantic swell. There was bright sun. Down through that peaceful afternoon the *Ark Royal* and her six destroyers carried out the search. Just before three in the afternoon the great carrier turned into the wind to fly off her Swordfish anti-submarine patrol. As she made the turn two torpedoes passed astern of her.

Instantly the destroyers turned, spread on a line of search, and raced in the direction of the estimated position of the submarine. The *Ark* herself turned away from the attack and made full speed from the scene of action. Big ships may not linger in the presence of a submarine.

The sea that had been peaceful was alive suddenly in the menace of war. Over the long, oily Atlantic swells there were scored now the six harsh furrows of the destroyers' wakes. The surface of the sea itself was rippled with the double turning of the ploughshare bows. The "F"s were together—*Faulknor*, *Firedrake*, *Foxhound*.

Foxhound made the first contact. In the wind of her passage the attacking flag raced to her yardarm. She turned a little, increased her speed and stormed in to the kill. From *Firedrake* and *Faulknor* they watched the swift attack. They saw the first charge drop over the stern; they saw the throwers break in a little puff of smoke and following thunder. They saw the depth charges hurl up into the air and the stems behind them tumble over and over in a wild, unsteady arc. They saw, as they raced past, the quiver of the first explosions, the shattering of the sea surface, the volcanic fury of the bursts.

There was a second attack. Again the calm sea broke in a wild, tumultuous anger. Still there was no sign of the submarine, nothing but the thin betraying voice of the Asdic. There was no sign of damage or destruction.

Again they wheeled. They were like sea eagles over a lesser bird; like the great skuas wheeling in to flash upon the hidden fish.

Firedrake hoisted the attacking flag this time, racing in with the strange quiver of excitement that takes ship and crew as well in this climactic moment of the hunt. Her charges were set to explode deep—perhaps the U-boat had sunk into the blind darkness of the lower depths, groping her way to that cold safety from the furious charging of the waters.

Firedrake made her contact.

She went through the ordered ritual of the attack. She raced away.

Astern of her the sea was silent. Apart from her wake, apart from the double chevrons of her bow wave that rippled lazily across the sea, there was nothing but the two diminishing pools of the throwers' charges—the fading splash marks—to show what she had done.

On and on—and still the sea astern of them was silent. Before, the great canisters of T.N.T. had thundered when they were scarcely clear, but now they waited—waited till they reached their secret depth; till dropping through water that changed from the pallid surface greens to blue and from blue to the deep edge of purple, they found the pressure level to which they had been set.

Then suddenly the sea shattered again, a quick heaving motion, a tumescence on the surface, fissured like ice that is veined with streaks and cracks and bubbles of air. The break came later; not this time the huge fantastic fountains of the shallow charges, but a more sober bursting, a less exuberant spray.

And with it came the U-boat. She surfaced level, her conning tower first and then the whaleback of her hull, almost the motions of a normal emergence, save only that she was not surrounded by the white, stertorous pother of blowing tanks. Caught in the gigantic upward swell of the explosions she was swept, helpless as a leaf in the tumble of a millrace. They learned afterwards that her gauges had been wrecked in the violence of the explosion. She did not know even that she was upon the surface.

She knew within the instant. *Firedrake* was turning already to come in for the new attack. She opened fire with "B" gun. The shell missed narrowly, sending up a tremendous fountain beyond the long grey hull. *Faulknor* opened fire; the air quivered with the thunder of the guns, grew acrid with their smoke. *Firedrake* opened with "X" gun, the two guns firing on the beam. *Faulknor* hit on the casing of the U-boat—they saw the red flash of the shell burst, the smoke cloud, the flying debris. *Foxhound* was racing in to ram, her bow wave high in a mad, killing urgency, her stern set down in the tumult of her wake.

And suddenly they saw figures on the conning tower of the U-boat, figures of men, their hands held up, arms outstretched in the urgent bitterness of surrender. U-39 had thrown up the sponge. Another submarine was done. As more and more men tumbled out, leapt to the narrow deck, jumped, some of them to the water, *Foxhound* turned away and slowed. *Faulknor* and *Firedrake* closed that battered hull. Along the main deck the bosun's mate was shrilling the urgent pipe, "Away sea boats crew." In his path the hands ran aft to man the falls. The crew jumped for the whaler; the Sub-Lieutenant was there. The boat dropped to the water, pushed off, crawled beetle-

by A. D. DIVINE

The Story of a Destroyer That Wouldn't Give Up.

like across a sea to which stillness and calm had once again returned.

Faulknor and *Foxhound* had been nearer to the kill; their boats were first in the water; they picked up the bulk of the prisoners, forty-five of them all told. *Firedrake's* whaler picked up eight, turned, and came crawling back across the sea with them.

The U-boat sank, going down bow first. As she disappeared there was a sharp explosion—scuttling charges going off. They took the prisoners on board, and, with the inevitable kindness of the seaman to the beaten foe, they fitted them out with dry clothes and cigarettes. Most of the Germans were wearing the German variant of Davis escape gear as they came aboard. There was one officer with them, an Oberleutnant zur See, and with them also was the engineer. With a curious blend of arrogance and nerves, the Oberleutnant demanded to see the rest of the prisoners before they were taken forward. They were fallen in upon the quarter-deck. One of them, a wireless operator, was slightly injured by cuts, and suffering from shock. When they had fallen in and were standing at attention the Oberleutnant walked sharply forward, lifted his hand in the Nazi salute, and barked out, "Heil Hitler!" From the ratings who had assembled about the quarter-deck to watch the proceedings, from the crews who still stood by the guns, there was a burst of derisive laughter.

CHAPTER NINE

IN the Petty Officers' bar of the canteen there were two of *Firedrake's* petty officers. It might have been the O. A. (Ordnance Artificer) and the E. A. (Electrical Artificer). On the other hand, it might have been a whole set of different initials.

When the warning went and the melancholy lucubrations of the siren was followed by the sound of bombs, the canteen staff went—hurriedly. The canteen staff was composed of what the lower deck calls "Rock Scorpions," generally with an epithet salted to choice. They were so quick upon the order of their going that they left the O. A. and the E. A.—or whatever the initials were—in, so to speak, possession of the field. This clearly was a gift from whatever gods may rule these matters. Neither of these two gentlemen had a very high opinion of bombs—they had seen so many. They finished their drinks leisurely, and the bar attendants being by then well in some ultimate cranny of the bowels of the Rock, they pondered, for they were thirsty. There was no one to serve them. What should they do?

They did.

When they had finished the second drink they were still thirsty. September is a dry month in Gibraltar.

So they did it again.

The guns just outside the canteen bar were making a tremendous noise now, so—just to steady their nerves perhaps—they did it again. And then it may have been that their nerves felt unsteady because of a louder bang than usual, so they did it once more. And by that time, of course, it became a matter of habit, and so a very good time was had by two grave petty officers sitting alone in what would have been a very cheerless place had they not taken the necessary steps to readjust the atmosphere.

They did make one effort, as was right and proper, to rejoin the ship, but the brutal and licentious soldiery sentinel upon the roads outside, dissuaded them. They went back to see if there was any more friendliness along the canteen bar. There was.

The raid endured three hours. I do not claim that they spent three hours discussing the merits of the case along the bar, but they spent a reasonable time.

And then, while the other batteries were doing their manful best along and about the Rock, they heard a change in the note of the battery outside. Its four-gun rhythm was reduced to three. There was a limp in it—a sort of hop-and-go one.

They had just one more for luck, and they went outside to help the military. One gun of the battery had jammed and the military could not clear it in the heat and dust of action. But the E. A. and the O. A.—the O. A. especially—were experts in such things as this. They went forward, tackling the strange uncertainties of the recreation ground manfully, and they offered their services.

There seems to have been some little doubt at first, but they convinced the military. (They were apt, it is said, to be a little hard to convince.) And they not only convinced the military, but they put right that gun in quick time—knowing, as it were, their way about. They put it right, they reloaded, and then, proud of achievement and flushed with victory and a gallon or two of the assorted produce of the vine, the barley and the hop—not forgetting the berry of the juniper—they decided to stay and help the Army.

Now the Army had then—things, I believe, are different today—a revered and careful plan of zones. It seems, if rumour—always untrustworthy—is true, to have been devised much upon the plan of that elementary courtesy of the shoot which is contained, epitomised, in the polite words: "Your bird, sir." They did not pot at one another's birds. If the plane was in Zone A, then the guns to which Zone A had been allotted, fired. And when it crossed into Zone B the guns of Zone B took up the tale.

I am no expert. Perhaps there was good scientific reasoning behind this planning, but to the E. A. and the O. A., simple if slightly elevated sons of the sea, there was something curious in this convention. It was like a man who has been used to auction and finds a difficulty in understanding the complicated conventions of contract. Perhaps they had never taken part in a shoot at a noble house and did not know the magic formula. "Your bird, sir." They saw the plane in the next zone to theirs, and they swung the gun and fired at it.

The crew of the gun seems to have been a bit annoyed: the officer in charge extremely so. But after all they came from a ship where there was one anti-aircraft gun that fired when necessity demanded to every quarter of the compass.

They saw another plane and fired again, after which proceedings seemed to become a little confused. The Army was very grateful for the clearing of the gun, but there are limits to its gratitude, and there were no limits to the ambitions of the E. A. and the O. A. now.

A good time seems to have been had by one and all. There is no precise record of how they eventually left the field, but it is known that they left it with honour and with the stuff of laughter. So far this has not been cited

HIGH LIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

as a type case for naval and army co-operation. Since it may not reach the textbooks I record it here.

The great raid was over. They did what they could to help the sinking trawler across the harbour, but there was little that could be done. And on *Firedrake* they stowed away the empty shell cases that littered the deck all round the platform of the cooling "Q" gun.

And then the log book says, "18:00 hours—air raid." It was not a raid, but the warning went. It was a single "snooper" that came flying over to view the field. *Firedrake*, indefatigable, opened fire on her, and she went away. "18:10 hours," says the log, "all clear."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WE sailed at sunset and, as the lower deck had said, we turned towards the east.

We sailed with *Barham* as our main support, *Ark Royal* as flagship: *Sheffield*, *Glasgow* and *Berwick* of the Town class cruisers, four mixed destroyers and three of the Eighth.

We went out with the high mountains of Andalusia on our port hand, and the summits of the Atlas, like a shadow, to the south.

And in the early afternoon of the following day we saw a shadower—a Cant flying boat, low down and far away. We saw *Ark's* fighters, circling round the Fleet, fly off in the sudden straightness of the hunt. She disappeared. She had a long start on the fighters. All Italy knew within the hour that we were in their sea.

The fighters came back. *Ark* turned into the wind and took them aboard again.

In an hour she went off on an errand of her own, accompanied by three destroyers and one cruiser. We watched her huge bulk—like a segment of an ice barrier; flat topped, square ended, enormous—move off and diminish to the north.

We were alone now and without air support. And in the evening came another shadower. She came in the cocksureness of immunity close to our Fleet, and hovered impertinently about our going.

And once she came too close. Instantly, along the big ships, there was a reply of ready fire. Their upper works vanished for a moment in the flaring of anti-aircraft smoke. We heard the crash of their guns even as we came into action ourselves with the 3" astern.

The Cant swung wildly, jerked herself about, and ran like a wounded hare for Italy—like a hare that has come too close toward the hunter for peace of soul.

The night took us, the night when no shadowers come; and we wondered what morning light would bring. One battleship, one aircraft carrier, three cruisers and a handful of destroyers—and we were heading forward to a turning point not eighty miles from the Italian base of Cagliari. A third of the Italian Navy could have overpowered us as we stood—in theory. Half of it could have destroyed us utterly—on paper.

They had thirty-six hours and more of warning of our coming. If you count from the hour of our departure (known in its last and most intimate detail to the watchers on the Spanish shore, to the German spy organization at Algeiras and La Linea—of which it is said commonly that it knows what the Admiral has for breakfast in Gibraltar an hour before he has it) they had two whole days. Even if the main Italian Fleet were at Taranto, it had only six hundred miles to come to meet us against the nine hundred that we had to steam. If they were at Naples they were only three hundred and fifty miles or so away—twelve hours' steaming at thirty knots.

There was nothing on earth to prevent the Italian Fleet being in the narrows between Spartavento and Galita Island six hours before we got there. We had to make the approach to those narrows through twelve hours of daylight—daylight and the exquisite visibility of a fine Mediterranean winter's day. We might well look for trouble with the morrow. We might look for it even with the dawn.

But with the dawn there came the *Ark*. She had been off to bomb Sardinia again, dropping her eggs on base and aerodrome, sending her sentinels of the sky off for news of Mussolini's navy. She had none—none that mattered.

Then a little after dawn we saw another shadower, saw her as a speck against the sky towards the east—tiny, remote, hostile. She came towards us, pressing home her reconnaissance.

The Cants of the Italian Air Force had not yet learnt as they were to learn, the lesson of our fighters. We watched *Ark's* dawn patrol come into the attack—three planes whirling across the clouds, three fighters in a hurry. They seemed to leap from cloud patch to cloud patch, crossing the little intervening lanes of blue as an arrow leaps from the bow towards its target.

We saw through the glasses the Cant turn and begin to hurry back to home. We saw the attack dive home. And then we saw a trail of smoke that began horizontally, curved and then fell like a plummet to the sea.

"It's too easy with those Cants," said one of the pilots afterwards. "Damn it, it's like taking candy from a kid!"

We went on. The sea horizon ahead of us was empty with the strange, remote emptiness of the war-time sea. There was no enemy. There was no friend. There was no sign of life. . . .

We saw suddenly a string of coloured flags climb hurriedly on *Ark Royal's* mast.

"Signal flying to stagger the line," said the leading signalman as our answering pennant rose to acknowledge. We saw the pennants fluttering down the line.

"Executive," said the leading signalman.

We watched the big ships moving out of the strict immaculate order of their going. The line that had been pencilled straight as the haft of a spear upon the sea, was broken as if the spear shaft had shattered into fragments.

We of the destroyers got another order—an order to close upon the big ships. We were already at first degree of readiness for aircraft action.

And now from the wireless rating on the bridge we heard the flow of information.

"Hostile formation approaching so-and-so. Distant so many miles."

"Hostile formation so many miles approaching."

Each time the miles diminished, each time the enemy was nearer.

We were going into action eight hundred miles from Gibraltar—a long swim home. With me on the bridge the Captain, the officers and the crew were tin hatted, their life belts inflated; the Captain's Gieves waistcoat, pulled on over his uniform jacket, swept out behind him with all the grace and elegance of a Victorian bustle. The look-out on the starboard side was thoughtfully putting an extra puff or two into his "Mae West," letting it run down a little, blowing it up again as if there were some exquisite nicety of adjustment after which he sought.

We were going into action, but there was no tension even on the bridge. The Captain was talking of the restoration of Georgian houses—his house in Kent. . . . They were too old in bombing for tension now.

"Half the trouble is in stripping off the old paint, you see. Why people will . . ."

"*Sheffield's* opened fire, sir."

"Aircraft green 90. Angle of sight 45."

"Six—nine—fourteen."

"Where the hell are our fighters?"

"Barham's opened."

"Glasgow... Berwick..."

"There goes the Ark!"

"Low—they're shooting too low!"

The sky was flecked with the brown and white puffs of the bursting shells, a monstrous smallpox that spread between the planes and the ships—a rash of angry colour against the white of the clouds.

The aircraft were coming in from the sun, taking advantage of the dazzle in the gunners' eyes—in the eyes of the predictors. They came on, keeping strangely good formation.

We watched the destroyers on the starboard side of the screen open fire in their turn with their small guns. The pattern of the smoke puffs became more complex, more ragged as their individual appreciations cut across the ordered procession of the predictor patterns. We saw a few bursts high up amongst the planes, saw the formation break up a little, and then close up again.

"Bombs!" shouted the Sub-Lieutenant.

We saw far off, two miles or so clear of the nearest ship, three great fountains lift out of the water.

The planes came on. These were ranging shots—splashes upon which to correct bomb sights for drift and windage.

The guns were firing in a continuous drum-roll now. The ships seemed crowned with plumes of angry scarlet. The air quivered with the crack of the anti-aircraft shells that answered the deep booming of the guns below. We heard a pom-pom come into action though the range was too great for its effective use, adding its staccato chatter to the deep bass thunder of the guns.

We did not hear the whistle of the bombs. The leading signalman saw them though, his eyes trained to an almost more than human acuteness.

We saw *Ark* disappear from sight in a monstrous uprushing of water—not fountains these, but geysers, broad based; crowned with high whiteness they lifted as if the whole surface of the sea was lifting against her side.

"By God—they've got *Ark*!"

We saw *Barham* straddled, the enormous uprush of water beyond her on her starboard side, another between her and us. To port we saw them fall near *Duncan* of the screen. We saw two fall, straddling our own line.

We saw *Ark* come out of the wild flurry of the descending spray unharmed, unbattered, untouched.

The firing was louder now, more thunderous as guns fired over us. We heard the screech of uprising shells. We heard the slam of our own gun joining in; the water lifted in mocking fountains about us as splinters of the shells fell.

"What goes up must come down," said the Sub-Lieutenant, philosophically, as something clanged against the steel bridge work and fell metallic to the deck.

The planes passed over.

"They keep extremely good formation," said the Captain dispassionately.

The pockmarks followed them along the sky. Then the drum-roll faltered, diminished, and died away. The air was clear.

We went on. The wireless rating began to chant again, "Enemy formation distant so-and-so miles. Retiring."

"Now my house," said the Captain, "is mainly 1720 or thereabouts, but the older portion..."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE bombardment of Genoa opened at dawn on the morning of Sunday, February 9th. Visibility was moderate, a slight mist lying over the land. Over the mist the end of the Ligurian Alps, the

"FIREDRAKE," by A. D. DIVINE

beginnings of the Apennines, showed clear and hung rike dark cloud banks in the pale primrose of the dawn.

The Fleet Air Arm opened the proceedings, flying off from *Ark* while there was still barely light to see the deck, racing past the Fleet to bomb Spezzia and Pisa and Leghorn.

Force H made the land close to Rapallo; precisely at the very pin point of the prearranged landfall they had turned and slipped up the coast—the big ships in line, the destroyers forming a screen that had most of them on the landward side, between the big ships and possible small craft attack from an awakened enemy. The Engineer-Lieutenants had much advice on the keeping of a "clean funnel."

Slowly, almost leisurely, the Fleet moved up the coast. Slowly, inexorably, it came to its bombarding position.

And as it approached it there broke out over Genoa a vigorous display of fireworks. The spotting planes were over, the spotting planes that had flown off *Ark* after the bombing planes had gone, to watch the fall of shot and correct it.

There were behind this operation weeks of patient Staff work, elaborate practice. Models had been built, plans made and laid, exhaustive efforts had familiarised the pilots with every aspect of the dockyard from photographs, from drawings and from charts. They knew where every salvo was meant to fall. It was their job to see it fall.

But Genoa greeted them rapturously as a daylight raid. The sky was pocked with shell bursts and the pin prick of the flashes. The Mediterranean itself sprouted with tiny flames.

The big ships came to the bombarding point and opened fire—*Renown* first, her guns tremendous in the morning. The flames leapt up, the brown rush followed it. The shells screamed out. *Malaya* opened. *Sheffield* took up the tally.

The three went on, the guns continuous, never silent—the still air rocking with the sound.

And in Genoa the pin pricks showed always in the sky. Genoa was looking upward, but had forgotten to look out to sea. These heavy crashings along the docks, along the warehouses, into the shipyards of the sea front must obviously be bombs. After all, there were planes overhead, men too could see them in the dawn light.

Five minutes went by... ten... the land was still unconscious of the sea... fifteen. Then there was a flash under the mist—a brighter flash than before. At last the shore batteries were opening. The first shells fell well short of the destroyers, a long way from the big ships.

Their smashing, relentless pounding went on. Force H rolled by past Genoa thunderous with every minute of the passage, the great guns slewing round from forty degrees or so off the bow until they bore thirty degrees or so abaft the beam. And all the while this stream of shells—the big ships' 2,000-lb. projectiles, *Sheffield's* quick-fire 100-pounders—crashed into the awakened city. Fires showed under the haze; great columns of smoke rose.

Then the line turned, the destroyers turning with it, keeping always inside the big ships against the possibility of danger.

It did not come. One ship only moved from the harbour. It was not possible to identify her, but she was a small merchantman of some sort. She was left alone. For the rest, as the Fleet ran down again, there was nothing except the thundering of their guns.

The challenge of the shore was pitiful, ill placed shells bursting impotently between Force H and the target. From the air there came no challenge.

The second run finished down below the city.

HIGHLIGHTS of the NEW BOOKS

Three hundred tons of shells in six and twenty minutes—behind Force H Genoa's water front was a smoking ruin. Up the valley where the great Ansaldo works lay, there was fresh ruin. The power works were in flames. The electricity works were wrecked. There were huge fires along the port. The dry dock was badly damaged. Ships on the ways were wrecked, dock facilities ruined, the railway smashed about.

Force H turned out of the Gulf of Genoa at speed and headed for home, waiting for the inevitable vengeance of the air.

It came—two planes: one of them the duty anti-submarine patrol, armed probably with depth charges; the other a stray bomber, manned, so reports said afterwards, by the duty officer and the duty N.C.O. of the nearest aerodrome to Genoa. They flew up, had a look at Force H, dropped their bombs comfortably two miles away, and flew home—honour satisfied.

Force H put its hands in its pockets and strolled home. The Italian communique said:

"Early on Sunday morning a British naval squadron, favoured by dense banks of fog, appeared off Genoa. In spite of immediate intervention by the coastal batteries the enemy's salvos caused heavy civilian casualties, 72 being killed and 226 injured." (The number of killed was afterwards increased to 144.) ...

"An Italian air formation reached the British force in the afternoon, and a British cruiser was hit in the stern."

Sheffield was the only cruiser with us. Many times have I been aboard her, but I never yet walked two miles from her waist towards her stern—and her quarterdeck must have been a full two miles long to take that hit!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THIS was a giant convoy. The increasing air effectiveness at Malta, the Fleet's own counter-measures, the improvement of anti-aircraft fire, and a dozen other factors, had made the Sicilian Channel not "safe" again, but usable. Convoys were passing through it to the beleaguered east. Von Rommel had settled on the Sollum line. Tobruk was holding out superbly, backed by the undying work of the small ships that kept it fed, supplied and ammunitioned; that brought out fresh men to relieve its exhausted troops, that brought back its wounded, that kept a modern *Acre* going on the flank of the enemy.

A big convoy gathered in Gibraltar to go eastward, covered by Force H again. There was not much of excitement on the way to La Galita. They were shadowed again, but not till they were close up to the old narrows were they bombed.

This time Force H was going deep into the narrows with the convoy, and in the narrows the Italians launched their first attack. And in that attack the Eighth Flotilla had its first loss of the war, for H.M.S. *Fearless*, the companion of many venturings, a faithful member of the little Fleet, was hit and so damaged that she had to be sunk. She was the first of the flotilla to go. It took two years of war before she went. She had given magnificent service in those years. She had borne her full share of the heat and burden of those days.

Because of the possibility of mining by the Italians, two destroyers were sent ahead with twin sweeps to lead the long lines of the convoy through. *Firedrake* was one. With the long line of the convoy and the heavy ships astern, she led proudly into the gateway of the Sicilian

Channel. And there at dusk, adventure came at last to her as well.

It began with a mistake—one of those inevitable, unavoidable mistakes of war. They saw coming on them three twin-engined planes, low down on the water. End on and at a distance, one twin-engined plane looks like another. They opened fire with "A" and "B" guns, putting up a barrage against the possibility of torpedo attack. Then, as the planes came nearer, they were recognized as Beaufighters, the convoy escort coming out to meet them. *Firedrake* and the other ceased fire. The Beaufighters sheered away.

They expected three forms of attack—torpedo bombers, high-level bombers, dive bombers. It was the last that came in just on the edge of dusk—a swift, determined attack from every point. They fought it gamely, hampered by the sweeping gear, unable to turn and twist against the enemy; the 3-pounder thudding, the Oerlikons with which she had been fitted in the spell at home, the .5s, roaring as the attacks developed to their end.

Bombs fell about them, some ahead, some on either beam—on the quarters, astern. Plane after plane came in. Again and again the water beside them lifted twice as high as their masts, dark with the smoke of the explosions, lethal with flying metal.

They turned and twisted as they could, always with the great sweeps out behind them.

They say the Captain was magnificent. He was talking of his delphiniums when the attack began. He remembered his delphiniums as it went on. He conned the ship remembering them. They said that at the last he was remarking, "You can't trust a jöbbing gardener with transplanting—I think that one got us."

It had. It was not a direct hit. It fell alongside of them, abreast of Number One boiler room, and Number One boiler was not lit. It blew in the side a hole that would have taken a horse. The bulkhead between Number One and Number Two gave with the frantic inrush of the sea. The stokehold crew came up through the ladders with the water snatching at their heels.

The Lieutenant (E), who was on the bridge when it hit, was level with the hatches as they came. They went down to Number Three and there, working in darkness with live steam filling the roaring spaces and the bulkhead "bulging like cardboard," they shored the metal, stiffened it with props and struts, and made it somehow safe.

And on the flagship they were trying to come to a decision. *Firedrake* was right inside the gateway of the enemy. If she were helpless, she could not be got away. They made a signal to her telling her to prepare to abandon ship, and to another destroyer to stand by to sink her so that she should not fall into the hands of the enemy.

And then occurred the second mistake of the day—a mistake so splendid that I have my doubts of it. The story is that the Captain sent down to the Lieutenant (E) and said, "Can you make steam?" The telephones were out of action, communications disrupted.

The Lieutenant (E) said, hoping against hope and gambling on his men, something to the effect that he could get steam in twenty minutes. He meant, he said afterwards, that in twenty minutes he could make some show towards making steam, perhaps get the strained joints and battered steam pipes under control again.

And somewhere between him and the messenger and, I think, the Captain, that message became, "I can have steam in twenty minutes."

The signal was made to the flagship that *Firedrake* would have steam in one boiler in twenty minutes' time. One boiler means seventeen knots. *Firedrake* won her reprieve.

They say it was a mistake. I think it was the very spirit of that gallant ship coming to vocal life in this last, most dire emergency.

She was reprieved. A "Hunt" class destroyer was told off to stand by her and take her in tow if necessary. Force H and the convoy went on to the east—the main attack of the enemy beaten off, no ships of the convoy lost.

And there, in the twilight, the two little ships lay waiting for a new attack that might fall on them at any moment; while in the wreckage of the boiler rooms, they fought the sea, the hot metal and the strange incomprehensibilities of steam. They passed a tow line, and as darkness fell without attack, began their journey. Sliding by inside Galita Island, between that and the Tunisian mainland, they crawled to safety.

ALL night the men laboured in the engine room. The twenty minutes estimate had been a gesture—they could not translate it into reality, but they would not give up hope. They fought the harshness of circumstance, and with the dawn hope was alive again.

They lit the boiler, the long roaring flames leaping again beneath it. There was a "cloud"—the silver nitrate in the feed water as they tested it, showed in a swirling cumulus of salt. It was a cloud that would have turned the engineer's hair grey in normal times. They disregarded it while they fought to get the evaporators going again. And just before dawn they thought they had succeeded, at least they had got steam for the auxiliaries though not for the main engines.

The "Chief," tired to the very fluid of his spine, went aft to his cabin to snatch an hour's sleep before the light came—and the attack they knew must come with it. When the first barren attack—the approach of the Beaufighters—had developed, he and two officers off duty had been having a pre-dinner glass of sherry in the wardroom. He had dashed to his cabin for his cap, and put the glass of sherry down on his desk. Now in the dawn when he came, incredibly tired, from that strange battle beneath the deck, his glass of sherry still stood there unspilled. It had survived the turning and twisting of the fight, the smashing thunder of the bomb. He drank it gratefully and went to sleep.

There was no attack at dawn, though they stood to the guns and waited while the light grew on the sea, while the sun came out over the sea rim chasing them. No hostile plane appeared.

A little after that a "snooper" came by, passing them low on the water and just out of range. But the tow rope had temporarily disappeared; she could not mark their injury. Nothing followed her, but an hour or so later they heard a destroyer calling. She was announcing attack by aircraft, her position only a few miles over the sea rim between them and the eastward. It may be that she took the punishment sent out for them. It did not matter, for she and the ships with her took no harm.

Later they saw smoke on the horizon astern of them. Once again they stood to the guns. This might be pursuit. It was hardly credible that surface ships of the Italian Navy would come so far in chase with Force H in their waters, but no one could deny possibilities—they were for thirty-six hours less than 100 miles from the Italian base of Cagliari. And then from under the smoke, as they saw something of the upper works of a ship appear above the horizon, they spied a winking light. I do not guarantee either the beginning or the end of this story, but it was told to me as sober truth. The winking light said, "Are you British?"

Firedrake's Captain is said to have replied "Very!"

Se non è vero è ben trovato.

This was an empty convoy coming back under cover of Force H's presence, from the east. This was the convoy that had been attacked possibly in their stead. It went by in a hurry, obedient to its orders.

The other two went on; *Firedrake* for some fresh water from her escort, and tried again but for fifteen daylight

hours they were in tow in enemy waters. Midday came and the afternoon, and still they were left alone. Night came. And then at eight A.M. next morning they finally got steam. By noon they were almost settled to the new order, keeping steadily ahead. And still steady, still undaunted, they closed the Spanish coast to get the shelter of the land before Gibraltar.

And there Admiral Somerville did one of those things that have given him his stout name with the men who serve him.

Force H was at sea. They saw it to the southwest climb over the sea rim, and they saw the destroyers of the screen. Then, as they watched, Force H came up to them in a superb sweep, a long perspective of magnificence and power. Then as each ship passed *Firedrake*, limping along, the great hole in her side open to the sea, listing a little, battered, worn out and utterly exhausted, the great ships cleared lower deck, brought every man to the open, and cheered her as they went past.

Not often has a small ship had that honour. It was a sign of the Fleet's recognition of a most gallant denial of defeat.

And so they watched the big ships speed away. The story of the million miles was almost done.

They limped into Gibraltar Harbour with the dusk, and went—it was too late to go to dry dock—alongside at the Tower. There were two destroyers in the berth already, *Foxhound* and *Faulknor*, the flotilla leader.

The Lieutenant (E), unshaven, desperately weary, crossed over as the lines were belayed to ask for lights, so that he could give his weary people rest. *Foxhound's* engineer was not aboard. He was in the next ship, they said, and the "Chief" crossed over there to see him.

As he went in through the lobby and down the ladder to *Faulknor's* wardroom, he heard a cheerful roar. The wardroom was full of people, very full, so crowded they could hardly make room for him. But as he shouldered in they recognized him and shouted. He was not feeling "much like parties," but he asked the reason for the festivity. This was the "million mile" party. *Firedrake* with her voyage had completed the flotilla's million miles at sea.

They filled him up with gin and honour. *Foxhound* came to the rescue with lights. The million miles was over, and *Firedrake* had ended it with a fine gallant story.

Now she was to go out of the war for a little. She could not be repaired at Gibraltar, and so she was sent over to the Boston Navy Yard, patched for the journey, to make good her damage.

But as always, following her established precedent, lest there should be too much of drama, too little of humanity, there crept in once again the little note of farce.

In the dawn of the next morning some of her seamen leant over the rails at the side to regard the hole that gaped wide and fantastic in the still water of the harbor. Looking from it they saw coming toward them a small dinghy pulled by a single man. It came close, and closer still. They could make out the rower; he was clad in a pink shirt and shorts, pulling vigorously. Once or twice he looked over his shoulder, but headed straight on for them.

Closer and closer—he was almost alongside and he showed no sign of turning. Closer and closer—and suddenly he shot into the hole. They watched, filled with indignation. It was their hole.

The dinghy turned inside. They heard the noise of oars. Then the dinghy appeared again, and headed out to the open water.

"What the blank blank blank do you think you are blank well doing in there?" said a second-class stoker, belligerently.

The rower looked up—it was the Admiral.

Tomorrow in Egypt



THIS CONCLUDING STORY OF A REMARKABLE SERIES OFFERS A
 DRAMATIC ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE POST-WAR WORLD.
 ("THE DRIFTING FACE," THE FIRST STORY IN A BRILLIANT NEW
 SERIES BY GORDON KEYNE TO BE GROUPED UNDER THE TITLE
 "QUEST, INC.," WILL BE A FEATURE OF OUR NEXT ISSUE.)

by *Gordon Keyne*



At the westernmost edge of India, where northward rise the sawtooth Beluch and Afghan hills, and southward the rampant ocean runs to the Pole, lies Karachi. Beyond those northern hills, in the Uzbek and Turkomen states of the Soviets, are names of forgotten history, fragrant romance, sinister evil—Merv and Samarkand, Khorassan, Bokhara, Yezdikand.

In the privacy of the rest-house at Drigh Road Airdrome, the war-bred city just outside Karachi, I sat with Kessiloy and Sir Abdul Mohand. We sat wordless and dismayed. Never in history had three men possessed such absolute power as ours, yet we were helpless and defeated by the silent unseen thing no mortal man had ever conquered—Death.

"By the rules of metaphysics," Sir Abdul said slowly, "by the tenets of religion, by the laws of science and the intuitive hopes of mankind, it should be the other way around: life should overcome death. But it has not happened so. Voldimar Ley is dead."

Yes, the gallant Russian to whose rescue we were committed, was dead—murdered in his Yezdikand prison, despite our elaborate measures for his safety.

Even in our great achievements, with the resurgent world drawn peace-ward, and the ghosts of war forever exorcised, we were hard hit.

In those fevered days after the Last War, much had been won. Backed by the Coalition of the Four Freedoms, that association of the noblest minds from all countries aiming at liberty and peace for mankind, we had conquered intrigues, problems, monopolies, selfish interests. The International Court of Justice, Tennyson's dream of the Parliament of Man, was established in economic and political guidance of the whole earth. The Four Freedoms were man's law. We had ended our work in that stroke at Yezdikand.

Not without casualties: Norman Shane, our leader, lay ill somewhere in Upper Egypt; and Madam Ley, that magnificent woman who had so devotedly aided him, was in a Bagdad hospital. They had tried to kill her: they had murdered her husband. And we, who had sworn to rescue Voldimar Ley as the price of her aid, had failed.

As Norman Shane's secretary, I represented him—a little lame in-
 firmed by name. Sir Abdul, the flower of Hindu science and culture, had guided India's troubled destiny in those hectic days. Kessiloy, who sat

with us now, a troubled frown on his broad peasant face, was the great post-war Soviet leader, hero of the Asian peace. He picked up the phone.

"It must be done. I'll do it," he said simply. "Central? I want to speak with Madam Vera Ley at the Maude Hospital in Bagdad."

There was no delay; we had all air priority. Into Kessiloy's eyes came an expression of incredulity as he listened; his voice burst out like a drum-beat.

"Not there? Impossible! Explain!"

WE tensed, as we waited. Something had happened. What now? Sir Abdul must have guessed, for his dark liquid eyes were brooding. I too could guess. It had something to do with that devil incarnate, Andrew Lessing.

In our swift, savage blow at Yezdikand, Lessing had again escaped us, after murdering Voldimar Ley. How or whither, we did not know; he had accomplished the impossible. Undoubtedly by air, since he was an accomplished pilot. No one else had escaped from that nest of anarchy; but he, alone and outlawed, stripped of power and wealth, might yet defy the world.

Lessing had every attribute of the American genius except one: he had initiative, ability, a talent at organizing, an almost hypnotic magnetism; but he lacked vision. He failed to see that the world wanted and would have peace. As leader of the forces of selfish interest, he had caused the Canadian wheat-riots, the bitter warfare at home between rival labor factions, and the Bill of Rights rebellion.

He had fought the Coalition of the Four Freedoms tooth and nail, and had all but substituted anarchy for the International Court. Against Norman Shane he had been virulent. He had come within an ace of flinging the United Nations back into warfare and dissension. Now he had no refuge anywhere on the globe—if, indeed, he had escaped from Yezdikand.

Kessiloy laid down the phone and wiped sweat from his cheeks. Karachi was hot.

"She disappeared last night," he said. "How? No one knows. She was recovering well from her wound. She might have walked out, so far as that went."

"It's impossible!" I echoed his own words. "A European woman just couldn't disappear in Bagdad! It's obviously impossible!"

"Wait!" said Sir Abdul in his calm way. "The obvious is seldom true, my friend."

"Right," approved Kessiloy. Like so many Russians, he was a master at chess. "Or, we might say, the obvious is a pitfall for the unwary. Obvi-

ously, Lessing could not escape from Yezdikand; yet he must have escaped."

Sir Abdul smiled. "And obviously she could not have left the hospital precincts; yet she did. That suggests a relation between the two facts. . . . Hm! Have you given any study to the remarkable new equipment of the Air Control police? Some of it was used at Yezdikand."

Then and there Sir Abdul must have had an inkling of the truth. Kessiloy was too impetuous to enter any subtle play of words or ideas. He was already on the phone again, calling Bagdad, demanding any possible details of interest.

As it chanced, I had of late been hearing about the new Air Control police planes. These were the transparent and therefore nearly invisible helicopters developed by Curtiss after the war. Made of plastics, they had carried still farther the principle of engine-silencing by means of metal alloys, used in the Lockheed Lightnings during the war. Thus these new planes were not only largely invisible but nearly silent in operation, though of course the propeller hum could not be done away with. . . .

The phone rang, and I answered. It was the Bagdad Air Control authority speaking.

"We've found one curious detail which may or may not be concerned with Madam Ley," he said. "This is a scrap of white cotton that corresponds to the material of the hospital nightgowns. It was found on the flat roof of the hospital. Two words are faintly penciled on it: '*Kom Ombo*.' Of course, this may have nothing to do with the case. The words mean nothing."

"Thanks," I said, and rang off. The hospital roof! That hit like a blow. I looked at my companions, told them, repeated the two meaningless words. An exclamation burst from Sir Abdul.

"By the thunderbolt of Shiva! She left it—she left it! But how could she have known? She could not. That devil Lessing must have known! It's all clear now, all clear!"

"Suppose you make it so, my scientific friend," Kessiloy broke in grimly. "What, where or who is *Kom Ombo*?"

Sir Abdul was polishing his spectacles in some agitation.

"You remember that Norman Shane," he said, "was removed to a spot in Upper Egypt for beneficial climatic and sun treatments? I and Sir John Wells, who was called from London to treat him, alone knew the spot. It was kept such a close secret that I did not even tell you! Well, that spot was close to the temple of *Kom Ombo*, in the desert hills near the First Cataract."

So the truth broke upon us. "Lessing!" I cried. "Somehow he's got one

of those police helicopters—he has carried her off! But why?"

"His hatred of Norman Shane is a colossal thing, too great for any words," Kessiloy said. "When all else is gone, it remains. He has taken her, yes, meaning no doubt to kill Shane by using her as a lure—to kill them both, in fact—"

"No time for theories," I snapped, and grabbed the phone. "Abdul, quick! How to reach Shane?"

He told me. Shane was installed in a camp on the Upper Nile with only Dr. Lenormand, a French specialist in the therapy being used, and two attendants; secrecy was depended upon for protection. There was, however, a radio-phone; and in less than five minutes I had Lenormand on the line.

"Yes, Mr. Hammond, all is quiet here," he replied to my questions. "Mr. Shane is doing marvelously. . . . No, no visitors. Would you like to speak with Mr. Shane?"

Sir Abdul made me a gesture of caution, so I refused, told Lenormand we might see him soon, and rang off. Kessiloy took over and arranged with Cairo to establish a police guard above and around the First Cataract zone; he also sent out a general alarm concerning such a plane as we guessed Lessing to have. Meantime, Sir Abdul sat in a brown study.

"Still worried?" I asked, smiling. My own alarm had vanished.

"I am never worried," said the scientist thoughtfully. "But I am still thinking about the oddity of life always being overcome by death, when it should be the other way around."

Kessiloy stared. "Bosh! Life always ends in death. The oldest thing man can remember is death."

"The world has changed," said Sir Abdul gently. "Well, we have much to do in New Delhi and elsewhere; but I do not think that fiend Lessing, being at the last extremity, took away Madam Ley as a passing joke. I should feel easier if we went at once to *Kom Ombo*."

"While that man is loose, our work is never finished," said Kessiloy; and he at once arranged for a plane—no helicopter, but a speedy racer.

IN half an hour the plane reached Karachi and we went aboard. . . . The new conception of distances that with the war's end had replaced all global travel notions was never more clearly shown than now. No spot on earth was farther than fifty hours' flying time from any airport, thanks to stratosphere travel. Thus from Karachi across Aden to the Nile, a stiff traverse in the old days, was a mere flea-hop for our racer.

We landed at the Assouan airport in time for lunch at the old Cataract House. A helicopter from the Cairo

Air Control was placed at our disposal. It was one of the latest police ships, with Captain Becke, an Aussie war ace, as pilot. We had been well conned by the air patrols before arrival; and now, when we took to the air in the helicopter, we found the lookouts vigilant, and though we had but a few miles to go, were repeatedly challenged by radio. I emphasize this point, in view of subsequent events.

We headed downriver toward the narrow gorge of Silsileh, the limestone district whence came so much stone for the ancient temples. Although we knew where the camp was, we had some difficulty in finding it; and as we hovered there a few hundred feet up, I realized why this spot had been selected for utter privacy and safety.

Some miles to the east of us lay the railroad and a Sudanese village. Directly below us, on a bluff overlooking the river, was the ruined city site of Kom Ombo, the Golden, so named because it was a point of departure in Egyptian days for gold-dust caravans. The excavated and restored temple and enclosures, a gem of later Egyptian art, was totally deserted; for at that time, it will be remembered, Upper Egypt was still closed to tourists.

OPPPOSITE the temple, guarded by the Nile, on a desolate little island, all naked sand and rock, lay the camp, a cluster of tents whose khaki canvas so blended with the sand as to be nearly invisible. Becke located it when Shane and his three companions came out of the tents to greet us, and we settled gently down beside them. We had agreed to say nothing to Shane about Vera Ley's disappearance.

For us all, and chiefly for me, it was a joyous reunion. Already Shane looked bronzed and vigorous; the enforced rest had smoothed out his rugged features; and as we gripped hands, I caught the feel of his massive personality in its full strength.

Dr. Lenormand was a spade-bearded Frenchman, a brisk, amiable man. The two attendants were capable Egyptian army nurses, who did all the camp work. Supplies were landed twice a week by helicopter.

Sir Abdul conferred with Lenormand on Shane's condition, and was more than satisfied. Then Shane, Kessiloy, Sir Abdul and I sat under one of the tents and talked for an hour, giving Shane an account of all that had transpired since we parted from him. During his long days of sun-worshiping he had roughed out answers to many of the problems still facing the new order of things, and we discussed all this. It was good to feel his firm, energetic hand once more on the controls. He asked how long we meant to be here.



Somehow Lessing had seized a police helicopter and carried Vera Ley off!

"Oh, two or three days," Kessiloy rejoined cautiously. "We might move up here tomorrow from Assouan. I've never seen Upper Egypt, and it interests me. Also, we'll want to confer with you at more length."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Shane. "Too bad Lessing got away from you. As long as that man is alive and free, he'll make trouble for the world."

"I know what I'd do with him, if I had the say," observed Sir Abdul, then smiled and shook his head. "No, no; I shan't tell you. I don't believe in killing, you know, even as a punishment for that man. After all, what we call evil is variable according to one's standards."

"Old age, at least, is an evil we can agree upon," said Kessiloy, laughing. "Not at all," Sir Abdul dissented gravely. "Age is but the gathered dust of the homeward road, which lies thickest in the day of return. Does death end life? No. Life ends in

life, my friends—always in life. A new life, though as yet hidden from our eyes."

A curious man, this Hindu scientist! That evening before dinner, wandering among Moorish arches and lattice screens of the old Cataract House, with its magnificent view of the cataracts and the open desert beyond, I came upon Sir Abdul sitting in a corner, busy with pencil and paper.

"Well, our worries were all vain, our theories all fruitless, and our efforts all wasted," I said, dropping down on the cushions beside him.

He smiled slightly. "No effort is wasted, Hammond. It may seem so, but there is always an effect."

"No doubt," I rejoined. "What are you working at, if I may ask?"

"The problem that so interests me. It is a mistake to say that death overcomes life."

"Still on that subject, eh?" I said carelessly. "Well, we're born to die:

regardless of your philosophic double-talk, life invariably comes to death."

"But not as an end; merely as a door of passing into another life," he insisted gently. "I've been trying to work out the answer to my problem by way of a formula. Let life be x and death be y . If x and y be equal to each other, there is no answer. But if, as I am certain, y is greater than x , there must be something left over."

"The unknown, then, should be represented by z ," I said.

He dissented. "No, no! If y , and something over, term it y plus a , really exist, then this will give us the fraction x over y plus a . What does this fraction equal? Why, the common denominator, which we may call b . Now, what is this common denominator? Use the same radient as is given for all problems; the figure of a root—"

I have always eschewed mathematics with frantic horror. Whether his exposition made any sense, I did not know then, and have never ascertained; for at this instant we were interrupted by a houseboy carrying a radio-phone and bawling my name. I answered. No response. Finally I had word that a call had come for me from some stratosphere point above Cairo, but had been abandoned.

KESSILOY joined us and we went in to dinner. The Russian, upon learning of this call, looked startled.

"But this is serious! Lessing, who may or may not be alone in his escape, has Madam Ley with him. She had left the clue for us, remember! She might have called you here, only to be prevented from putting the call through—"

"Wait!" I intervened. "She couldn't know where I'd be!"

"I think we've underestimated Lessing," he said gravely. "Hasn't he escaped us repeatedly? Hasn't he evaded every effort of the Air Control and the International Court as well—a world-wide effort—to apprehend him?"

He leaned forward and continued gravely:

"We're going on pure supposition. But if we're correct, if he's clever enough to get possession of such a plane, why wouldn't he know where we are, where Shane is? Remember, those police planes are equipped with devices which pick up all etheric communication, whether by radio or voice."

"And I," Sir Abdul said, "was a member of the Inventions Board which perfected those very devices. You are right, Kessiloy! Give the alarm. Have an air search made above Egypt and the desert! But it will be useless. Give the man due credit for diabolic ingenuity. We're

fighting to catch him; but he's fighting for life and escape and revenge, therefore the odds are in his favor."

"You and your formulas!" snapped Kessiloy.

He did send out the alarm, but nothing resulted from it. He called the camp, spoke with Lenormand, and warned him to be on guard.

"Good thing we're moving to that camp ourselves in the morning," he said. "The safety of Norman Shane is the first consideration in the world, just now."

"Meanwhile, we're not helping Vera Ley," I put in.

Kessiloy shrugged. "What can we do that we've not done? We must wait. Shane's more important than a dozen such women; he'd be the first to admit it."



I was not so sure. She had more than once saved Shane's life and had contributed heavily to the completion of our task. I knew Norman Shane admired her intensely—not as a woman, necessarily, but as a splendidly vital force for good. I was thankful that I did not have to tell her that Voldimar Ley was dead in Yezdikand. Lessing would have told her long ere this, enjoying the stricken pallor in her cheeks and the deathly hurt in her eyes. That is, if our supposition as to his abduction of her was correct; as yet, we had no particle of confirmatory evidence.

I remember we listened, that evening, in the main lounge of the hotel, to television broadcasts from the Peace Conference in Vienna, and from the Asiatic Congress in New Delhi, eulogizing Norman Shane and the magnificent work of his backers who

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



It had happened a few moments previous to our arrival. . . . One of the tents was missing.

formed the body of the Four Freedoms Coalition. Little did those who broadcast, or those who listened, suspect the grim irony of destiny. For at that very moment Lessing must have been biding his time.

And what must have happened next morning, but for the poetic desire of Sir Abdul Mohand to witness the quivering Egyptian sunrise? That brief time of day, said he, when vibrant life wings through the electric air, had inspired the poets and sculptors and builders and even the very religion, of ancient Egypt; therefore he meant to be up and out at dawn. So we ordered a sunrise breakfast and ordered Captain Becke to stand by for an early start. . . .

The chill pre-dawn darkness found us up and dressed. Kessiloy and Sir Abdul wandered down toward the cataracts to get the full effect of the

magic sunrise from the river. Thanks to my bad leg, I was not disposed to wade through sand and clamber around rough rocks. So, after they departed, I went out in front of the hotel to where Becke was warming up the helicopter.

"Funny thing about that Kom Ombo temple, Mr. Hammond," he said. "They tell me it's built double. Two gods were worshiped there: the god Horus, and Sebek, the crocodile god. The right side is where Sebek was worshiped, and Horus on the left side—"

I enjoyed talking with Becke; he was an interesting chap and full of ideas. He had a theory that the development of aviation, thanks to the war, was breeding an entirely new generation, men who had the peculiar flyers' eyes. War pilots, said he, and in particular stratosphere pi-

lots, had a certain look about the eyes that marked them out.

While we talked, the sun peeped up above the eastern hills. "You might give the camp a buzz and tell them we'll be along," I said. He climbed into the plane. I could see him inside, through the transparent plastic shell. After a bit he came back to the ground-level door.

"No answer, Mr. Hammond."

"They're not up yet, perhaps."

"No," he said. "The detectors pick up engine pulsations, and what sounded like a couple of shots, but might have been anything at all—"

ALARM jumped through me. Kessiloy and Sir Abdul were out of sight; but Becke's engine was purring. I went scrambling into the plane beside him.

"Get up there on the jump—full speed!" I cried. "Sound an alarm to the patrol planes as you go; quick, man, quick!"

The doors slammed shut. The engine vibrations quickened; the ship shook to them, and then stilled as she took the air. Becke was in his seat, talking rapidly. He turned to me.

"Patrols at five- and ten-thousand-foot levels report all quiet."

Perhaps I was a fool to fly into panic, I thought.

"Could such a machine as this have landed unseen?" I asked.

"Not likely, sir, but possible, if she came in from the east against the sunrise. The sun rises at the upper levels before it does on the ground, naturally; and against such a glare these ships aren't easily seen."

The ground was flowing under us like a river; we were not high. One of the patrol ships, Becke said, was coming down to meet us.

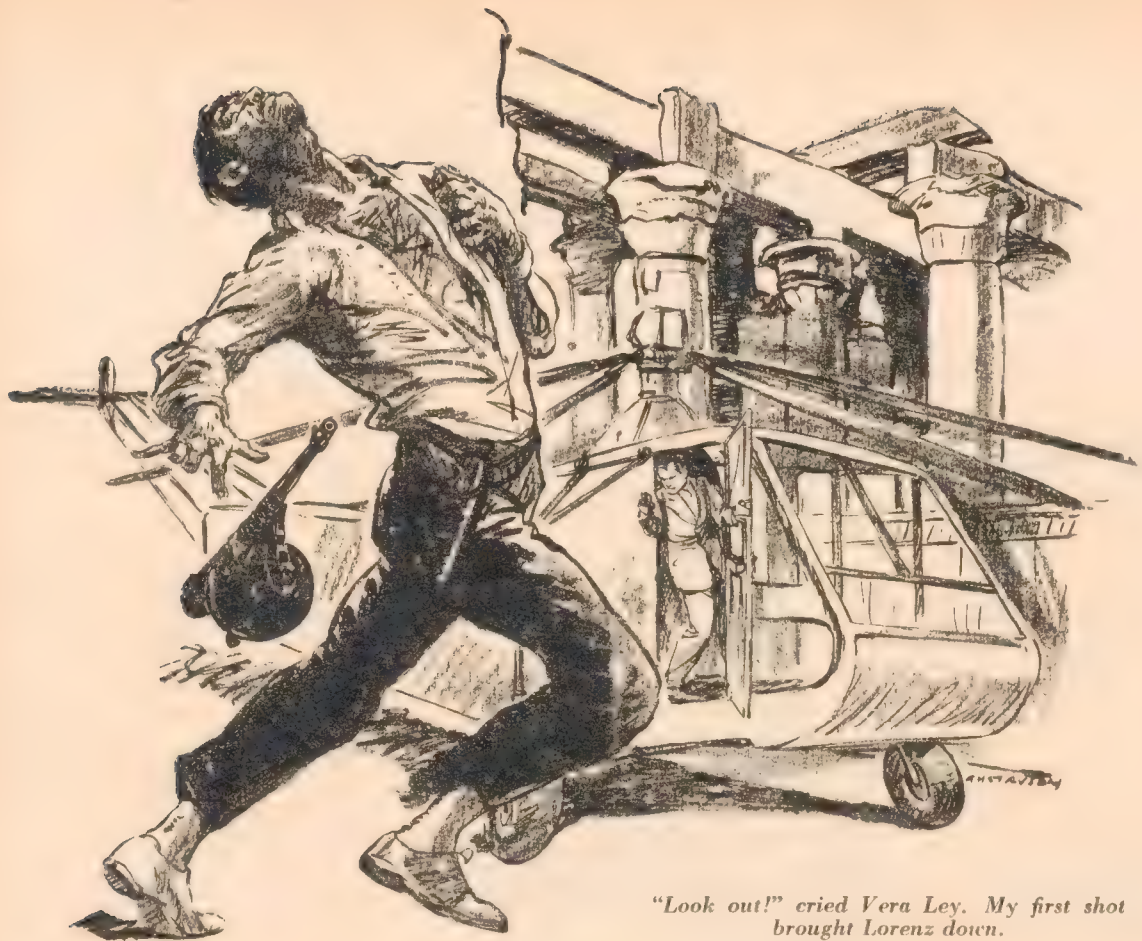
"Stop over the island," I said. "If nothing's wrong, we'll go back."

The temple came in sight, and the island. We came down to a hundred feet and halted, poised above the camp. The patrol plane was descending, far above. The camp showed no motion; but in front of the tents I saw a sprawled white-clad figure.

Becke saw it also, and we dropped swiftly. Before we touched, I recognized the sprawled figure: it was that of Dr. Lenormand. I opened the door and hurried to him. He was dead—had been shot twice. His body was warm; indeed, blood still streamed from the wounds.

A shout came from Becke, who had run past me into the first of the tents. I joined him. The two Egyptian attendants were there. They too had been shot. And the other tents were empty. No other living thing was here. Norman Shane had vanished.

I was stupefied—and no wonder. Becke's detectors must have picked up



"Look out!" cried Vera Ley. My first shot brought Lorenz down.

the shots that had killed these three men. It had happened only a few moments previous to our arrival. If any plane had left the island, we must have seen it, the patrols must have seen it. There had been no boat on the river.

THE patrol ship came down, its police crew joining us. They reported engine pulsations, which had ceased; but no plane had ascended from here. The sand around the tents was so tracked up as to reveal nothing.

"When did the engine pulsations stop?" I asked.

"Just after your alarm reached us," replied the patrol skipper.

"Then Lessing—for it's a question of that criminal—might have started away, heard the alarm, and taken to flight?" I asked.

"No sir, not unless he flew without engines! Those engines stopped dead. If a ship had risen to any height, we'd have seen or heard it, as we heard yours leave Assouan."

At this instant Becke made a curious discovery: One of the tents was

missing; rather, the khaki top had vanished, leaving the floor and walls in place, with three sleeping cots.

"Camouflage!" exclaimed Becke. "Remember how those tents blended with the sand? Our man may still be on the island or somewhere close by—he must be! He caught the alarm, cut the tent-ropes, grabbed the canvas and skipped out! He's not far."

"All right," I said. "You go back and get the others, while we get a few patrol ships here to quarter the ground. Move sharp!"

Already the air-lanes had taken the alarm; half a dozen patrols were pointing in for the island. While Becke went tearing away for Assouan, the police phoned their comrades and then began an intensive search, the helicopters covering every inch of ground in widening circles and finding nothing. From the island they carried the search to the desert on either side, and even downriver, on the theory that a boat might have been involved.

Kessiloy and Sir Abdul arrived with Captain Becke. The sun was well up by this time; it seemed impossible that

such a minute search could be eluded. We sought some possible clue in and about the camp; there was none. With every resource of science and invention to aid us, we were mocked by a clever rascal who had murdered three men, taken Shane, and gone.

"I think I'll cruise about with Becke," said Kessiloy, ever impetuous. "You chaps too?"

BUT Sir Abdul shook his head. He was looking up at the bluff across the river; a patrol ship had been hovering about the temple, and was now darting away.

"No," he said. "I was born for the earth, not for the air. Hammond, come with me; you're badly in need of a sedative. Drop us off at the temple yonder, Kessiloy. Perhaps the old gods will help compose our friend's mind. I'd like to see the place."

Seeing temples was about the last thing I wanted; I was in bad shape, true, for this blow had left me shaken to the depths. However, I had sense enough to realize that Sir Abdul's quiet composure would be good medicine, so I got in with them.

We lifted, skimmed the river, and sat down inside the wall before the temple entrance. Sir Abdul had been studying his watch.

"Do you know that we got over here in exactly fifty seconds?" he observed as we got out. "All right, Kes-siloy. Don't forget to pick us up in an hour or two."

The helicopter blades whirled, and we were alone with the gods. Abdul took my arm.

"Seriously, Hammond, there is no cure for hasty nerves like the quiet peace of a church or a ruined temple," he said. "Try not to think about Shane, old chap. Thank heaven there are no guides about! I like to see a place for myself."

WE turned in among massive pillars with their lotus-capitals; many of the sculptures were as brilliant as on the day they were carved and painted. Sir Abdul had evidently been reading up on the place, for he pointed out the twin entrance and vestibules and sanctuaries, and even explained the meaning of many wall-carvings. This temple had no great age as such things went in Egypt—merely a couple of thousand years.

I calmed under the influence of his composure and of the place itself, trying to banish the agonizing thought of Shane.

"To think of an entire city lying buried under the debris around this temple!" said Sir Abdul. "And the people who went down to death—and the life beyond! Perhaps I shall find the answer to my problem here."

"Still thinking about that blasted problem?" I asked, angry that at such a moment he could be so employed.

He smiled in his gentle way. "It is worth thought. What is the unknown common denominator that aids life to overcome death? It must be a quality common to both life and death, yet stronger than either," he was saying patiently. . . . He came to a halt. "Oh! What's that?"

We had wandered aimlessly among the partly restored columns and enclosures behind the imposing hypostyle. Now, as we turned into a paved court with stubs of broken pedestals along the sides, we saw a queer object bulking in the center. My heart leaped. It was one of the conical, wingless police ships, with khaki canvas draped over the helicopter blades—"Eureka!" exclaimed a mocking voice. "Welcome to our distinguished guests!"

There stood Andrew Lessing behind us, and at his side was another man covering us with a sub-machine gun. We had found the bitterly hunted quarry. Here, of all places!

Lessing swiftly strode forward. Under the obvious threat we stood mo-

tionless; he came to us, smiling slightly, and searched us. Neither of us was armed. Satisfied of this, he stepped back and eyed us for an instant, then addressed the other man.

"Put them in the ship, Lorenz, and keep your eye on that little lame man, until I've finished my conference with Shane. Trot along, gentlemen; you'll be in pleasant company. And don't tempt honest Heinrich Lorenz to use his gun. I want to keep you alive, temporarily."

He stepped jauntily away and disappeared, leaving us still wordless. Heinrich Lorenz! This unshaven, haggard man with the red-rimmed eyes so hungry upon us—so this was the famed Nazi ace whose deliberate bombings and strafings of hospitals and schools toward the end of the war had made his name execrated! He was one of the few badly wanted Nazis who had escaped a just punishment.

"March!" he said in guttural English. "Get in and sit down. Leave your seats, and I fire."

The gun gestured. We went to the plane, whose ground-level door was open, but obscured by a hanging corner of the canvas. Sir Abdul pushed it aside and we stepped in. Lorenz remained outside; he could, of course, see us clearly through the transparent plastic.

Behind the pilot's place were the usual four seats, equipped with canvas belts to restrain bodies and legs of recalcitrant prisoners—and in one of those seats was Vera Ley, held by the belts, eyes like stars of terror in her white face.

"Down sit!" barked the voice of Lorenz. "Quick!"

We obeyed, taking the two seats behind her, utterly at the mercy of that hellhound.

"You too!" she murmured. "Impossible, impossible!"

She was well wrapped in furs, over her hospital gown. Sir Abdul broke our stunned silence. I was too utterly choked with despair and dismay to speak, and was glad that she could not twist around sufficiently to face us.

To his question, she shook her head, saying:

"No. I'm quite all right. But Mr. Shane—they hurt him! He was all bloody when they put him in. Where is he?"

"We've no idea. Unfortunately, it was a complete surprise to find you here—and an even greater surprise to find ourselves still alive after he caught us."

"He wants to get an amnesty for himself and Lorenz. I tried to warn you, to reach you—"

"I know," said Sir Abdul. "I'm afraid we bungled things terribly, dear lady. Do you know—did he tell you—"

"He told me everything," she murmured. "Voldimar is dead. I know. No blame to you."

Silence fell. There we were, with that inhuman Lorenz outside—caught, helpless. It was unreal and frightful. Then Sir Abdul put his lips at my ear, breathing words so faint that the sound barely reached me.

"My friend, will you make me one sacred promise?"

I nodded, and he went on.

"If I tell you what I should like to do with that man Lessing, and you have the power to do it, will you carry it out in my place?"

I nodded again, with an ironic smile. As though we would have the power to do anything with Lessing! It was absurd.

So Sir Abdul told me what he would like to see done to the man. That he should so speak at such a time was fantastic; even more fantastic was his proposed disposition of Lessing. For all his science, Sir Abdul was at heart a poet, set on poetic justice.

"Okay; word of honor," I rejoined. "I'd like nothing better. But don't be an optimist. That time will never come. And here's our friend the devil coming now."

LESSING was striding across the courtyard. Despite his unshaven, unkempt appearance, he was alive with energy; he fairly radiated power. That curious face of his, so instinct with ability—that dynamic manner and amazing personality which so quickly overwhelmed all average opposition; lean, dark, aquiline, a profile like that on some ancient Greek coin—what brilliance lay in that man, and what devilry!

He slid into our cramped quarters and put himself into the pilot's seat. "A stubborn man, Shane," he observed, and picked up the radio-phone. Lorenz, standing at the door, put in his head and spoke.

"Shall I strap up these two?" he asked, indicating me and Sir Abdul.

"Not yet; we may have to kill all of them shortly. Now it's win or lose," Lessing rejoined. He was in a flame of concentration; indeed, he must have been actually on fire inside, for this was the moment of his last and greatest gamble. He put in a call for General Blount, in charge of the International Court commission at Cairo, giving his own name. Almost at once, Blount answered, for the dark face smiled and the eyes lit up.

"Lessing speaking," he said, as though the whole earth were not hunting for that name. "I'm in Upper Egypt, General. With me are Norman Shane, Mr. Hammond, and Sir Abdul Mohand." He did not mention Vera Ley; her name would not avail him. "These three men will

die unless orders are given within thirty seconds recalling all patrol ships in this area. Call me back and we'll discuss the matter further."

He switched off, tuned in the detectors, and waited. We all heard the orders given. We heard Captain Becke and Kessiloy, somewhere in the ether, utter sharp protest; they were instantly overruled, and two patrol ships were ordered to escort them to the base at Khartoum. Cairo headquarters were taking no chances on our lives.

A SMILE like lambent flame played over Lessing's features as General Blount called. He responded:

"Thank you, General; wisely done. Any attack upon me, and these men will be killed. For their immediate release, my terms are simple: For myself and Colonel Heinrich Lorenz, who is with me, an unconditional pardon and amnesty from the International Court of Justice, with freedom to go whither we may desire. That's all."

All! It was eerie to sit there under guard of those red-rimmed eyes of Lorenz, and to know that every quarter of the world was listening to this cool impudence on the part of the outlaw who had tried and failed to wreck that world anew—to imagine into what a dither those words must be flinging news-rooms and chancellories!

This very publicity was Lessing's cleverest stroke. For its own prestige, the World Court, if it granted him amnesty, must keep its pledged word, even to this mad dog. All was being done in the open in the sight of all men. We could hear the answer that came in.

"Lessing, you'll be held to strict account for the safety of those men! I can't give you a response offhand to such a demand. I'll have to consult the World Court itself."

"Naturally," said Lessing. "Contact the Chancellor, Sir Arthur Bridges."

It was done. We waited. Sir Abdul looked at me; in his face I read my own thoughts mirrored. Our own lives mattered little to us. The thought of this evil-starred creature thus escaping all penalties was maddening.

The voice of Sir Arthur Bridges came in from Montreal, faint but distinct. Lessing stepped up the detectors, and it strengthened.

"Very well, Lessing; I will accept your terms on behalf of the Court. But first I must speak with Norman Shane; I must know that he is alive and well."

"Right," said Lessing, and twisted around. "Lorenz! Go and cut Shane free. Bring him, if you have to carry him!"

"But these men—"

"I'll take care of them," said Lessing, lifting the pistol from his lap. "Go!"

The Nazi clattered away across the cleared pavement.

"So," observed Sir Abdul to Lessing, "you have preferred self-preservation to revenge!"

Lessing smiled. "Naturally. Who wouldn't?"

Sir Abdul gave me one look that electrified me, then began to rise.

"It depends," he said, "upon the individual. Self-preservation, to some persons, is not the all-important thing it is to others—"

"Sit down!" barked Lessing, jerking up his pistol. Neither he nor any of us, I think, realized that we were still on the air.

"No," said Sir Abdul, standing up. "The World Court has no right to make any such bargain with you. Hammond! The pawn is sacrificed—"

As he spoke, he deliberately flung himself at Lessing.

The pistol exploded—then a second time, muffled against Sir Abdul's body. Vera Ley uttered a scream; I was already on my feet. Sir Abdul, falling across Lessing's seat and over it, had borne Lessing bodily to the floor.

I dived into the acrid pistol-fumes. The radio-phone had fallen. I snatched it up and slammed the heavy plastic object down full force. It struck Lessing over the head. I struck him again, and he collapsed limply. The pistol fell from his hand.

"Look out!" cried Vera Ley. "Hammond! Here comes Lorenz!"

I scooped up the fallen pistol. Lorenz was coming at a run, shouting something, alarmed by those two shots. I stepped into the doorway, and as he swung up his weapon, I fired. The first shot brought him down. The second stopped him as he tried to rise. The third killed him.

In a frenzy of grief and horror I turned to Sir Abdul, stooped, raised him a little. But both bullets had gone through his body.

"Outside—outside! The sunlight!" he gasped. "Then send her—Vera—to Shane—"

He was dying, and must have known it. I helped him out of the plane, while Vera Ley twisted in her bonds, screaming. Sir Abdul sank down on the hot stones.

"Leave me alone—send her!" he exclaimed. "Put Lessing—in her place—"

I scurried back into the plane and unbuckled the canvas strips that held Vera Ley; they fastened behind the seat so the prisoner could not reach them. As soon as she was freed, she darted outside and stooped above Sir Abdul.

"Go to Shane," he said. And with a sob, she obeyed.

I was making sure of the senseless Lessing—lugging him up, dropping him into the seat vacated by Vera Ley, and fastening the canvas belts. Then I stumbled out to Sir Abdul. The meaning of his words pierced me; he had given himself, that we might win this mad gamble.

He pushed me away, gasping:

"No, no—leave me in peace, Hammond. Your promise! Keep it—keep it!"

For an instant I stood there, irresolute. Although no pilot, I could do it; I knew how. His hand fluttered at me in mute command. With a gulp, I turned back into the open doorway of the plane; standing there, I jerked at the canvas above. It slid away, and came down in a heap.

I went inside. A snarling, animal cry burst from Lessing, as he tore vainly at his bonds. I ignored him, went to the controls, and started the engine. It pulsed and thrummed into life. Again I hesitated, weighing my own chances. It was an insane thing to do, but I caught a word from Sir Abdul, and this decided me.

"Quickly, Hammond—quickly!"

Standing as close to the door as possible, I reached for the helicopter controls. Lessing was screaming, frothing rage and fury. I jerked the stick back—and jumped. The floor hit me, and I tumbled out, falling to the stones beside Sir Abdul.

The ship was lifting straight up.

As I scrambled to my feet, she was fifty feet above us. I lifted Sir Abdul's head in my arms; his eyes were following the translucent thing above. Then they shifted, and I saw Vera Ley coming toward us. She was supporting the drooping, hurt figure of Norman Shane, and a smile came to the lips of Sir Abdul.

"So!" he said faintly. "So—there is one answer to the problem—the quantity unknown, which makes life stronger than death—love!"

His head fell sideways; he was dead when they reached us. And the faint speck overhead became fainter still, heading on up and up into the stratosphere and beyond, ever upward; it was never again sighted or heard from.

WEEKS later, I was present at the great memorial service when the remains of Sir Abdul Mohand were laid to rest under the memorial shaft in the central square of New Delhi. And I wondered if his gentle, wise spirit followed us, after those splendid ceremonies, to the quiet wedding of Norman Shane and Vera Ley.

I need not have wondered. Death is overcome by life, and life cannot but end in a new life, where there is love to aid it—as he had shown in his own final sacrifice, speaking the power of things unseen.

"I WILL now put my client in the box," said Hatchard, K. C., leader for the defense.

There was an instant stir in court, a vivid quickening of interest. The big moment of the murder trial, to see which the fashionable spectators had schemed and cajoled and bribed, was at hand. One could feel the blood pulsing through the court.

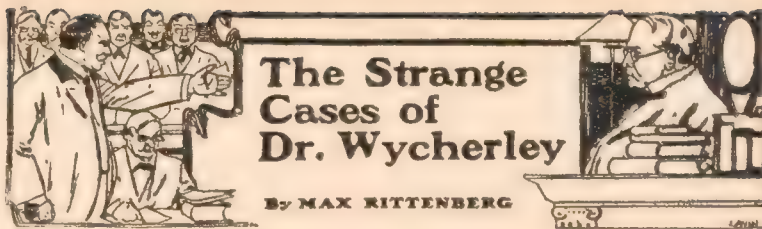
Up to now the defense had proceeded on lines dull and unstimulating to an audience which had come to see a man's soul laid naked. Witness after witness had been called to testify to Neil Lane's good character and his more or less friendly relations with the murdered man. What more could the defense do? An alibi was impossible, and the fingerprint evidence was damning.

Never did circumstantial evidence point so clearly to the guilty man. Stokes had been murdered in his studio, stabbed in cold blood while he slept on the couch by his studio fire. The weapon was a narrow, vicious-looking thrusting sword which he had brought back from the East and had always kept hanging amongst some other Eastern trophies on the wall by the fireside. It had been plunged into the murdered man's body again and again, and then by some strange oversight or queer whim on the part of the murderer, had been carefully placed on the floor by the side of the couch, parallel to it.

A friend of the artist's—a professional model—had testified that on the night of the murder she had called at his rooms and found him alive at 11 o'clock. He had one of his malarial attacks coming on, and had made up a couch, by the right-hand side of his studio fire, on which he was lying down. He had been drinking heavily and taking large doses of quinine, and the girl had found him surly and out of temper—in no mood for company. At his request she had mixed him a stiff glass of brandy and hot water, and had then left the studio.

Medical evidence had placed the time of the murder between midnight and 2 A. M. No suspicion attached to the girl, who was fortunately able to account for her movements after 11:10 on that night.

Between Stokes' studio and Neil Lane's was a trail via skylight, roof and parapet, which constituted the damning evidence of the case. It showed beyond human doubt that a man had crept and climbed from one studio to the other, and back again. On the soot of the roof were an abundance of slipper-marks and fingerprints—whose marks were they?



The Errand of Death

A Twice-told Tale from the July, 1911, Blue Book

The prosecution claimed that they were Neil Lane's—and had apparently proved their point up to the hilt. What surer evidence of guilt could be produced?

And yet officials and spectators, in spite of the overwhelming logic of the situation, were impressed by the open, boyish, impulsive bearing of the prisoner as he stepped eagerly from the dock to the witness-box. Now at last there could be action—personal effort—instead of that terrible wait-and-do-nothing while witness after witness for the Crown had pieced together the chain of merciless evidence which was to hang him.

In Neil Lane was no "iron nerve," no cold calculation of demeanor. He was a mere boy fighting for his life against the relentless machinery of justice—squaring his shoulders and taking a grip of himself in this last desperate effort to escape the gallows. The spectators quivered with the excitement of the chase, as when the hunted animal turns and doubles before the hounds close in upon him.

"Tell us now," his counsel was saying, "what you were doing at 9 o'clock on the night of the murder."

"I was in my studio studying a history of Flemish art—Duchesne's. I was tired that evening, and had settled down in my armchair in a dressing-gown and slippers."

"Until what time did you read?"

"Until about 9:30. Then Mr. Gollen came in. I gave him a whisky and soda, and we had a short chat."

"How long did he stay?"

"Until about 10 o'clock."

"You are certain of the time?"

"I remember the clock on my mantel-piece striking the hour soon after he left."

"Did you accompany him to the door?"

"No, we artists are not so ceremonious, and in any case Mr. Gollen was not a particular friend of mine—I hadn't invited him in. Then I took up my book again."

"Mr. Gollen left at once?"

"I suppose so. I heard the outer door shut."

"Now I want you to attend to this point very closely. You say that Mr. Gollen left before 10 o'clock. But the evidence given by Mrs. Parker puts the time she heard footsteps going down the stairs at between 10:30 and 10:45. Mr. Gollen has stated in evidence that he came to see you after he had called in on Stokes at 9:30, that he left your rooms after 10:30, that he took a cab and reached his club by 11 o'clock, and that he stayed there playing bridge until after 4 A. M. You are quite positive that he left you before 10 o'clock?"

"Absolutely positive. The clock struck ten after he went—that I swear to. Mrs. Parker must have been mistaken."

"What did you do after he left?"

"I began to read again. But I felt tired, and I must have dropped asleep over my book."

"When did you wake again?"

"Some time in the small hours. My fire was down to a few dull cinders. Then I got up from my armchair, feeling a bit dazed, as one does in those circumstances, and went to bed in the next room."

"You were in the same chair?"

"The same chair. My book had dropped on the floor. I had never left the chair."

"You never went out on the parapet, to your knowledge?"

"Never, never!" the young man cried out, turning an appealing face to the jury. "To my knowledge, I never stirred from the armchair! Oh, believe me, I never went to murder Stokes! Why should I do such a thing? In Heaven's name, why? What motive would I have?" His voice rang throughout the court—the cry of a hunted animal.

Hatchard, K. C., mentally patted himself on the back for having stirred up his client to this outburst, which was bound to have a sentimental ef-

fect on the jury. In his heart of hearts he believed that Neil Lane had murdered the other man in a fit of jealous passion, but it is no business of the advocate to wear his heart upon his sleeve.

The Judge intervened with grave impartiality.

"You must answer your counsel's questions," he told the young man, "and leave it to him to make the appeal to the jury."

Hatchard resumed the examination-in-chief on lines which he had decided upon as the only practicable defense. In his final speech he intended to admit frankly that the roof and parapet markings were Neil Lane's, and to urge on the jury with all the suggestive power of which he was such a master, that the young fellow, walking in his sleep in his slippers and dressing-gown, had wandered over to the other man's studio and back, but that the actual murder had been committed by some person unknown.

SO he sought to draw out from Lane that he was prone to the "brown study" habit, and that, in all probability, he was an occasional somnambulist. The young man eagerly gave affirmative answers to the former line of questioning, and detailed examples of his absent-mindedness, but he was doubtful about the sleep-walking. No one had ever told him about it, and of course he could have no knowledge of it himself. He could only say that it was very probable.

"You had no dreams on the night of the murder while you were asleep by your fire?" pursued counsel.

Lane put his hands to his forehead, and thought deeply.

"No," he answered after a pause. "No, I can't remember anything. I was just asleep in the ordinary way. There may have been dreams, but I don't recollect any."

The leader for the Crown, Garside—keen, polished, hard as glittering steel—rose to cross-examine.

"As to motive, had you no grudge against the deceased?"

Lane flushed perceptibly. "He was not a particular friend of mine, of course, but I hadn't any actual grudge against him."

"I put it to you that your affections and his were centered on the same young lady, and that her preference lay in his direction."

"That's true, of course, but it doesn't mean what you imply."

"I put it to you that heated words had passed between you on the subject."

The young man clenched his hands impatiently.

"Oh, be fair to me! I admit we had a few words on the matter, but that is utterly different from creeping into a

man's rooms at dead of night and murdering him in cold blood!"

"That is a matter for the jury to decide," answered the prosecuting counsel coldly. Then he continued with his merciless probing: "You had threatened to kick the deceased out of your mutual artists' club on one occasion?"

"He had been publicly talking of the lady—I don't want to mention her name—in a way no man with any decent feeling could stand, and naturally I resented it."

"Precisely—you felt you had a claim on her affections?"

"No, not a claim, though certainly I had some encouragement. But for that matter there were others who had a deep admiration for her as well as myself—Gollen, for one."

"The point is immaterial. Now, to take up a different matter—when Mr. Gollen was in your rooms that evening, you gave him a whisky and soda?"

"Yes."

"Did you drink yourself?"

"As a matter of civility, yes. But I only had a small drop of whisky."

"Was the whisky left within your reach after he had gone?"

"I suppose so, but I never touched it again. I expect I was too tired or too lazy to put it away. But really I didn't take more than one small glass."

"Have you never taken more than one small glass of an evening?"

"I wasn't drunk, if you mean that!" answered Lane indignantly.

The Judge interposed gravely:

"You must answer counsel's question."

"Well, yes, I suppose I have, occasionally—when there has been a jollification on."

"Then there was nothing to prevent you taking more than one glass on the night of the murder?"

"I tell you I didn't!"

"Is it your habit to fall asleep in your armchair?"

"Oh, no. Sometimes I get into a brown study, but I don't fall asleep in my chair and stop there till the small hours of the morning. I don't know why I did on the night of the murder. Heaven knows I wish I had gone out on the bust, or something."

"You admit that you sometimes 'go out on the bust,' as you term it?"

"I don't admit it at all!" Lane, deadly pale, was beginning to contradict himself, and Garside, K. C., gave a significant look toward the jury. Feeling was turning against the prisoner once more; to the facts of the case had been added the probable motive and igniting spark.

"When you have 'gone out on the bust,' I take it that you have come home the worse for liquor?"

Hatchard jumped up instantly:

"M'lord, I object to that question!"

The Judge allowed his objection, but an impression had been created in the minds of the jury which no formal ruling-out could efface.

Garside adjusted his glasses before making his final, merciless stab. Pointing dramatically at the prisoner with outstretched finger, he demanded:

"Tell us now why, if you were not the worse for liquor on the night of the murder—why you scorched the left-hand side of your dressing-gown by the dead man's fire as you stood silently by his couch looking down upon him with the sword ready to thrust?"

A shiver went through the court at the picture conjured up by the advocate's grim words.

Then a warder hastened forward to the prisoner's side—he had fainted.

From the body of the court, a man in a long fur coat, with grave, dark eyes and silvery hair, moved swiftly toward the witness-box.

"I am a doctor," he said. "My name is Wycherley. Can I be of assistance?"

The speeches for the defense and for the prosecution had been made—on the one hand eloquent, impassioned, appealing to the heart; and on the other hand cold, hard, mercilessly logical, appealing to the intellect. The Judge had given his summing-up, clear-cut and instinct with the impartiality of British justice, but pointing out emphatically that no shred of evidence had been adduced by the defense to place the murder onto another man's shoulders.

WHEN the jury filed back slowly and gravely into their box after the long wait, everyone in court could see the verdict in their faces. The prisoner went white at his first glance.

"What is your verdict, gentlemen—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, My Lord; but we strongly recommend him to mercy."

The chaplain moved to the Judge's side. The clerk of arraigns stood up and pronounced the solemn, formal question:

"Prisoner at the bar, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?"

Neil Lane squared his shoulders and looked the Judge in the face, eye to eye, as man to man.

"My Lord," said he, and his voice rang through the court and into men's hearts, "I ask for no 'mercy' of the usual kind. I am innocent, but I would far rather hang by the neck till I am dead than endure the hell of penal servitude for life. As you will one day stand before your God, My Lord, be merciful and give me death!"

The Judge took up the black cap placed by his desk. . . .

During the days that followed Neil Lane's conviction there were curious rumors current in legal and newspaper circles. Naturally the defense had lodged a formal appeal, and the rumors took the shape that new and wholly unexpected evidence would be brought before the Appeal Court when the case came up for hearing after the customary fortnight.

As with the breed of rumors, they assumed most explicit and circumstantial form as they passed from mouth to mouth. The actual murder had been the work of a woman—a jealous mistress. Lane had seen her in the dead man's studio on the fateful night, and was shielding her by his silence. Stricken with remorse, she had made a confession to her priest, whose religion forbade him to make known her identity. But the police were on her track. And so forth.

The real basis of these fantastic stories lay with Dr. Xavier Wycherley. He had attended the court merely in pursuit of his life study—the human mind, the psychological springs of action—but in the course of the trial, overwhelming conviction had come upon him of the innocence of Neil Lane. As a humanitarian, he felt impelled to do what lay within his power for the young man.

He was now endeavoring to persuade the Judges of the Appeal Court to step outside the grooves of British justice and create a precedent of a kind that struck the legal mind with horror. Thoroughly convinced himself of the young man's innocence, he had first to carry his conviction into the minds of the two opposing counsels, and then to arrange an interview of a most unprecedented and entirely unofficial nature.

Only his intense conviction, his magnetic personality, and his European reputation had made such an interview possible for a moment.

Lord Thorndyke paced his hearth-rug uneasily when he had listened to the doctor's astonishing theory of the crime. Hatchard and Garside sat with faces composed to legal inscrutability.

"But even granted that your theory were correct, doctor," Lord Thorndyke was saying, "how would that help matters? The law cannot take cognizance of the action of one human mind on another. If we once admitted such action, we should be plunged back in the old days of witchcraft and the legal horrors of the Middle Ages. Suppose that you could even *bring evidence* of a kind that gave color to your supposition—what follows? This man, Neil Lane, with an admitted jealousy toward the murdered artist, is stirred up to action in the hypnotic state, and climbs over the roof to kill in actuality the man whom in the ordinary way he would only have

killed in thought. But the law can only deal with the facts of the case: the psychological springs of action are outside its purview, except in so far as they mitigate punishment. The law says that he who kills must suffer the penalty of the law, whether he kills in rage and passion, or in cold blood, or under the stimulus of another."

Dr. Wycherley concentrated his keen, penetrating gaze on the finely chiseled face of the old jurist.

"Suppose," he replied, "that Neil Lane had no intention of killing—did not kill?"

"The jury found otherwise."

"The jury could only deal with the facts before them. Grant me this experiment, and who can tell what utterly unsuspected fact might not be brought to light? You, men of the law, have had a lifelong training in the marshaling and judging of the seen and the tangible. I, on the other hand, have had a lifelong training in judging the unseen and the intangible."

"I say this, with my reputation at stake, that there are unsuspected factors in the case that, so far, have not been touched by counsel for the defense and prosecution, anxious as both of them are that justice shall be done. I *know*, as surely as I know that I live, there is that to bring to light which only experiment can give us. Lord Thorndyke, I ask only for an entirely unofficial experiment. Whatever its results may be, their bearing and interpretation will be left unquestioningly in the hands of yourself and your colleagues on the bench."

THE Master of the Rolls paced up and down in silence, his forehead furrowed in thought. When at length he spoke it was to the counsel for the defense.

"Have I your assurance," he asked, "that the experiment will not be made public, or used for any purpose without the express consent of myself and my colleagues?"

"Certainly, M'lord. We are all agreed upon that essential. On no account must a precedent be created."

"Then," said the old jurist thoughtfully, "I will put the matter before my colleagues."

Dr. Wycherley had gained his point—the experiment had been sanctioned.

Singly and in perfect secrecy, so as to keep the matter away from the avid newspapers, the several participants in the coming proceedings had gathered together in Neil Lane's studio—the Master of the Rolls, the two counsel, an independent medical specialist, the prisoner and a Scotland Yard man in charge of him, and Dr. Wycherley. Round the studio buildings had been posted plain-clothes men to prevent any interruption on the one hand, or any attempt at escape on the other.

It was 10 o'clock in the evening. Everything had been arranged to repeat the conditions of the night of the murder. Sitting by his studio-fire, in his old armchair, with his old dressing-gown and his slippers on, sat Neil Lane, studying Duchesne's "History of the Flemish School." A single, shaded reading-lamp by his side lit up his book; in the outer darkness of the room sat the spectators, in agreement to keep perfect silence and allow Dr. Wycherley's experiment the fairest possible test.

In the studio of the murdered man, in the neighboring house, a fire blazed and a dummy form lay stretched upon the couch.

For a full hour they allowed the condemned man to read on, so as to let the environment soak into his spirit once more and prepare the mind for the hypnotic operation. Dr. Wycherley, sitting in the outer darkness, had been spending the waiting moments in making his delicate left-hand miniatures of Lane, of Lord Thorndyke and of the two counsel, drawn from his memory of the scene in court. These would afterward be filed away amongst the records of his cases. Now the psychologist moved forward to a place by Neil's side, and asked him to fix his gaze and his full powers of concentration on himself. It was highly necessary for the experiment that the patient should be sent into deep hypnosis, and accordingly Dr. Wycherley put aside his usual methods of verbal suggestion, and employed with all the power at his command the intensive gaze and the slow hypnotic passes of the old school of mesmerists.

In half an hour Neil's eyes had closed, and his arm stood out rigidly when Dr. Wycherley raised it to a horizontal position. The medical witness came forward with the jurists, and made the usual needle insertions in the arm and the light flashes into the eyes, so as to test the depth of the hypnosis. With a curt nod the specialist expressed satisfaction at the tests.

Dr. Wycherley put his hand on the sleeping man's forehead.

"It is 10 o'clock on the night of the murder. Tell me all that happened after that."

It was a strange, mechanical, far-away voice that replied to him from the body of Neil Lane:

"I take up my book and begin to read again. Presently my thoughts wander, and I fall into a brown study. Somehow I seem to feel in a vague way that a man has entered the room and is standing silently by my side. I do not feel it with my mind, but in a kind of unconscious way. I know that he is making passes over me, but yet I am not sufficiently awake to resist him. Now I seem to feel myself falling under the power of his mind—it is as

though his mind were entering into my brain and taking possession of it, side by side with my own mind."

"Do you know who the man is?"

"Now I know that he is Gollen."

"Does he speak to you?"

"Yes; he tells me to obey him, and have no fear. He tells me to stand up and I do so. He tells me to turn out my lamp, and I do so. Now he tells me that at midnight I am to climb over the roof to Stokes' studio, and kill him. I am horrified at the idea, and I try to resist his suggestion. I tell him that I would never do such a thing."

"What happens then?"

"He tells me that he was only joking, and that I ought to laugh at the joke. I believe him, so I laugh. Now he tells me that Stokes is very ill, and is lying down on his couch by the studio-fire. Unless he is tended he will become worse, and the fault will be mine. I feel sorry for Stokes. Now Gollen tells me that I ought to go at midnight and tend him. I reply that I will go. He gives me detailed instructions as to what I am to do, and leaves me."

"What is the time?"

"It is just after 10:30."

"Do you see this clock on the mantelpiece?"

With closed eyes the young man turned his head toward the mantelpiece, and replied:

"I see it."

"When it strikes midnight you will do exactly as you did on the night of the murder."

"I will do so."

The reading-lamp begins to waver and flutter, and, with a gasp, goes out. The room is plunged into darkness, except for the eerie flickering of the firelight which shows the watchers dimly to one another.

AS 12 o'clock strikes, the sleeping figure in the armchair rises, and with sightless eyes begins to move quickly to the window leading out to the parapet. The Scotland Yard detective responsible for the safety of the condemned man keeps close behind him, ready to catch him should he slip on the parapet or roof.

In a whisper Dr. Wycherley suggests to the others that they shall go around to the dead man's studio by the usual entrance. As they arrive hurriedly there is a noise on the roof, and Neil Lane makes his way in by the skylight.

He comes to the middle of the room and stares about him with sightless eyes. The watchers shiver at the uncanny deftness of this ghostlike shell of a man, with his automaton mind.

"Who is in the room?" asks Dr. Wycherley.

"Stokes."

"Where is he?"

"Gollen told me that he is lying down on his couch by the fire."

"Is there no one else in the room?"

"No one else."

Lord Thorndyke flicks thumb and fore-finger lightly together—a mannerism of his denoting that things are turning out as he expected. But Neil Lane apparently does not hear him or know that there are watchers of his movements. He goes over to the fire, and then moves near to it a small table holding a bottle of brandy, glasses, and a packet of quinine powder.

"Why are you moving the table?" asks Dr. Wycherley in surprise.

The even, mechanical voice of the sleeping man answers him: "Because Gollen told me that Stokes has moved his couch to where the fireplace used to be, and the fireplace to where the couch used to be."

Lord Thorndyke drew in his breath sharply and moved forward.

"And so I am taking the table nearer to Stokes' couch in case he were to wake up in the night and want medicine or drink."

Neil Lane goes to the wall and places his hand on a narrow, vicious-looking thrusting sword hanging with some other Eastern trophies.

"What are you doing now?"

"Gollen told me that I would find the poker hanging on the wall. I am to take it down and poke the fire into a big blaze, so that the sick man may have warmth."

The sleeping man takes down the sword, handling it as if it were indeed a poker, and starts to thrust it vigorously again and again into the dummy form lying on the couch.

"What are you doing now?"

"I am poking the fire into a blaze, as Gollen told me to do. That will make Stokes comfortable for the night, so now I can go back to my rooms."

Placing the sword upon the floor, neatly parallel with the couch, as though he were laying it on a fender, Neil Lane moves across to the skylight and begins to climb out, still with sightless eyes.

Lord Thorndyke whispers to Dr. Wycherley: "On the morning the murder was discovered, the sword was also found lying parallel to the couch. It was an extraordinary detail."

The papers next morning held an item of news of exceptional interest to Dr. Wycherley. A brief paragraph told that one of the chief witnesses in the Neil Lane case, a Mr. Gollen, had been dangerously injured in a motor-car accident while driving to Charing Cross to catch a Continental express. He was now lying in Charing Cross Hospital, and his condition was considered extremely grave.

At once the doctor left his breakfast untouched and hurried off to the hospital. Pleading matters of the ut-

most urgency, he asked the house-surgeon in charge for a brief private interview with the dying man.

Gollen, swathed in bandages, greeted Dr. Wycherley with a cynical smile. "Another of your specialists?" he inquired banteringly. "You're all no use; I know that quite well. My number's up. But don't imagine I'm afraid of death."

Dr. Wycherley gazed at him with his keen, earnest look, and answered very quietly: "Few men are afraid of death—only of the life after death."

GOLLEN, suddenly sobered, nodded in agreement, then added: "I'm not a 'religious' man—I don't believe in your heaven or hell."

"Is it your belief that the Ego will live on after death?"

"That I do believe. It is only my earthly body that I am going to shed."

"Then are you not afraid of meeting Neil Lane in the life hereafter?"

"Neil Lane—what the devil do you mean?" blustered the dying man.

"My poor fellow," answered Dr. Wycherley with a note of real pity in his voice, "I know all that you have been trying to conceal. No one can touch you now; the law is impotent. But will you choose to go to your new life with a double crime shackled to your soul—first Stokes, and now that poor boy who stood in the dock to receive his death sentence for the crime he had never dreamt of committing?"

"Stokes deserved all he got and more. I knew him in the East, and he was a *devil*. He gave me full cause. Yes; he was better out of the world."

"But Neil Lane! What harm did Neil Lane do to you? Can you bear to face him in the hereafter? When you have fled to the uttermost ends of space, and he pursues you still—out in the black void where no star gleams, beyond where the comets wheel on their courses—when his soul and yours come face to face, what will you find to say to him then?"

The dying man kept silence while the clock ticked through a full minute. Then he turned to the doctor and said: "I suppose you want me to sign a confession?"

"Yes; for your own sake as much as for Neil Lane's."

"Well, perhaps you are right. Bring me pen and paper."

The true story of the murder of Stokes was never made public in court—the hypnotic experiment was too dangerous a legal precedent to be published at large. But at the Court of Appeal it was put in evidence that Gollen had signed a death-bed confession of guilt; and in due course the announcement was made that his Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to extend a free pardon to Neil Lane.

WHEREIN A CIGARETTE-GIRL AND
A TAXI-DRIVER PLAY AN EXCIT-
ING HAND IN THE NATION'S DEFENSE.



Half a Queen

by SAMUEL
TAYLOR

THE girl didn't seem particularly frightened. It was only afterward that Bill Werner recalled little things. Now, take the way she got in his cab in the first place: He'd pulled up at the Fox Theater on Market Street and got out, hunching in the night rain, to let the soldier and his girl friend out. The fare was just fifty cents, and the soldier spun a half-dollar in the air, and ducked with his girl under the marquee out of the rain. There wasn't much light, what with the dim-out, and Bill Werner missed the spinning coin. But he caught it as it bounced, and in the stooped position, waved a reassuring hand to the soldier, who was looking back from under the marquee.

Then, straightening, and with a hand on the door to swing it shut, he saw the girl's legs.

Not the soldier's girl, but the girl who had slipped into his taxi during

the brief byplay of the falling coin. She'd wasted no time getting inside, for a fact. But then, taxis weren't as plentiful as they once were, with a third of them laid up without tires. So at the time Bill Werner didn't think much about how quick she'd slipped in. All he thought, as he slammed the door, was that they were nice legs.

Then there was her voice: There might have been a bit of a desperate edge to it as she gave him the address: "Three thousand block on Divisadero," she said. She did add: "And hurry, please!" But then, half the fares told you to hurry. It didn't mean a thing, with dim-out regulations.

"Yes, miss," he said briskly, and hopped in, making a show of haste, though as a matter of fact he hadn't really hurried since September, when he'd tried to beat the stork to the hospital. And that hadn't done any good. Bill Werner was a medical student, and that had been his first unsupervised obstetrical case. A success, as a matter of fact. They'd named the kid Billie Werneta Pasterino, which was as close as they could get, considering it was a girl.

No; Bill Werner didn't really catch on that anything was wrong as he turned into Van Ness and rolled along. A green sedan was keeping close behind him, but so what?

As a matter of fact, he was thinking about his tires. This old secondhand taxi was going to make him an M.D., if the tires held out and if he could keep on getting by with four and five hours' sleep a night. He was thinking, also, that he'd like to know the

girl. Her face, he'd noticed, was as nice as her legs. And the voice matched the face. Bill didn't meet girls in medical school, except two who were better forgotten. And night-hawking in his off time didn't give him any chance. Nice girls just don't take up with taxi-drivers. If he could strike up a conversation and tell her he was in med. school, and a second lieutenant in the reserve—but that was sort of awkward, and Bill Werner was just letting it drift idly through his mind, anyhow.

He turned left at Lombard, and eleven blocks farther on made the turn into Divisadero. It was here that he noticed the green car was following him like a shadow. He put his old cab into second gear for the steep climb ahead. The green car swung alongside as if to pass. In the night, the green surface glistened in the rain. The car pulled half a length ahead, so that the middle of its body was even with Bill's front wheels.

Then things happened. The green car cramped over to the right, crowding the taxi over. Bill didn't want to risk a tire on either the green car or the right-hand curb. He gave the green car the horn. It kept right on crowding him.

He rolled down his window and called: "What goes on?" He might have been a bit stronger in wording the question, except for thinking of the pretty girl.

Two men got out of the green car. They came down the steep street, one on either side of the taxi. The one on Bill Werner's left put an elbow in the open window. His right hand was in his coat pocket. He was a thin man, of medium height, dark, and not particularly healthy-looking. There

were dark circles around his eyes, giving them in the dim light a curious deep-set appearance.

"Hey, wait a minute," Bill Werner said, as the man on the other side opened the rear door.

"Just sit still, brother," the man with the circled eyes said.

"Is this a stick-up?"

"Sit still," he was advised. "And don't try reaching for that brick you keep handy on the floor."

"All right, sister," the other man was saying, at the rear door. "This is home; this is where you get off."

Bill Werner's jaw muscles clenched. Then they relaxed as, almost casually, the man with dark-circled eyes laid the barrel of a revolver atop the open car window. The barrel was only two inches long, but it had a big bore, and it was pointing straight at Bill's chest. He didn't have to be a medical student to know what a slug from that weapon could do to his lungs.

"Hurry up, Andy," the dark-eyed man said to his pal.

"I'm not going to get my eyes clawed out in the dark," the other man said. "Hey, you, driver, gimme some light."

Bill switched on the dome light. He noticed that the man at the back door was plump and red-faced. Then for a bit he forgot the pair of them.

THE pretty girl was gone! That was impossible. Bill Werner had learned long ago to fix those inside door-handles so that they just spun freely, with no connection at all to the door-latch. He'd lost a couple of fares in traffic, before learning that trick. So the pretty girl could have twisted on those handles until she was a grandmother, and never got out. The windows of course were up, against the rain. Assuming the girl

had wanted to risk a leg hopping out at some point where he slowed down in traffic, she still couldn't have done it. She had to be there, sitting in the back seat, that pretty face and those tapering legs. But she wasn't.

"She's gone, Tee!" the red-faced man said.

"Don't be a fool," the lean man said irritably. In the glow of the dome light, his face looked even more unhealthy with those dark-ringed eyes and sallow skin. "She couldn't have hopped out. We were following this car every step of the way." Then, taking the trouble to look himself, he blinked the dark-rimmed eyes, and looked across the empty rear of the cab at his plump pal.

"She dood it again, Andy," he said.

"But it aint possible," Andy said.

"It generally aint," the lean man said. He put his stub-nosed revolver into his coat pocket, and got out a pack of cigarettes. He offered one to Bill Werner, who shook his head.

"Look, brother," the lean man said. "Let's just forget it, huh, and stay healthy."

"Sure," Bill Werner said.

The two men got into the green sedan and pulled away. In his old jalopy, Bill didn't have the power to tail them up that hill, the speed they went. He did switch on his roadbeam for the license number, but the plate was conveniently smeared.

Bill Werner got out. He tried both inside handles of the rear doors. They turned around and around freely. He got back in the front seat and snapped off the dome light. Then he glanced over his shoulder, as if the girl might be sitting there again.

Then he laughed, just a bit nervously, said, "Oh, hell," and drove back toward town.

As he came along Van Ness, a man waved him down at the corner of Geary. The man was a white-haired, dignified old gent, and with him was



"Sit still," Bill was advised. "And don't try reaching for that brick on the floor."

another man and three ladies. Bill Werner pulled in at the curb, sprang out and opened the rear door. "Yes sir!" he said.

"But you can't do this!" a voice said from inside the cab. "I won't double up!"

One of the ladies of the party, who had been getting in, turned in the doorway to look at Bill.

"How about it, driver?" she said. "Aren't we supposed to double up in wartime?"

"Such uncoöperative spirit!" another of the ladies said, putting her face against the glass of the small window behind the door, and peering inside. "Just one passenger, and she objects to doubling up!"

"Well," the white-haired man said, "I don't suppose we can do much about it. If the girl hired the cab, she can refuse to share it. Thank you anyway, driver."

BILL WERNER muttered something. He poked his head in the doorway and took a good, long look at the pretty girl who was sitting in the back seat, nonchalant as a hog on ice, her shapely legs crossed, hands folded atop the black patent-leather purse in her lap. Then, as if clutching at something, some pin on which to hang some theory, Bill Werner with a forefinger turned the inside door-handle around and around.

"If you will kindly quit fiddling with that door-handle," the girl said, "I would appreciate being driven to my desired destination."

"My dear sweet miss," said Bill Werner, "if you wish to go to any desired destination with me, will you kindly get out of there and sit up here." He indicated the front seat. "Right here, where I can see you, hear you and"—he took her hand to help her alight, and found it actual flesh and blood, warm to the touch—"and feel you."

"Well!" one of the ladies of the white-haired man's party exclaimed, as the girl got into the front seat with the taxi-driver. "Well, I never!"

"Wartime, my dear," the white-haired man explained soothingly. . . .

The girl beside Bill Werner was of the type he admired, and hoped, some day, when he had that degree and his debts paid off, to marry. The prospect of that was not of course immediate. She was slender but not the human beanpole so much in demand as a fashion model. She was on the short side, as a matter of fact, with the self-contained trimness that seems to go with smaller people. And even now, seeing her there beside him, hands folded on the flat patent-leather purse, it was a bit hard to consider that it was a girl like this involved in what had happened.



"You were very clever," the man with the spy face said.

"You know some good tricks," he said.

"Well, I couldn't do anything else," she said. "I saw their car following. There was just one thing to do."

Of course—disappear into thin air. "Certainly," Bill Werner said. "No other course open. Do you do it often?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, this is the first time. I learned about it out camping."

"Naturally," he said.

"We made a bed with the car cushions and slept under the pines," she said. "Luckily, this car is made the same way. If you pull up the seat, you can unhook the back cushion."

A spark of light glowed. "Oh. Then you were in the trunk when the boys stopped me."

"Certainly. You didn't expect that I just up and vanished, and then materialized again."

"As a matter of fact," Bill Werner admitted, "I didn't know what to expect. I still don't. Do you want to go back to Divisadero?"

"No; I just said any address that popped into my head. They were after me. They'd found me in the theater, and I ran out, and your taxi door was open. You know the rest."

"I don't know nothing," Bill said, employing the double negative for emphasis. "Police station?"

"Oh—heavens, no!"

"No; naturally not," Bill said acidly. "Forgive me for thinking. Let's go at this thing backward, now—let's do it upside down, so it'll make sense."

"My name is Annie," she said, as if that explained everything.

"Not Annie Laurie?"

She nodded. "Everybody guesses it. And yours is William W. Werner."

"You didn't have to guess that," Bill said. Then he sighed. "All right, Annie. Call me Bill. And where do you want to go?"

"Well—just let me out anywhere, Bill."

"Then what?"

"I don't want to bother you with my affairs."

He looked sidewise at this girl, who was all of five feet one, and would tip the beam at a good hundred and ten, maybe.

"Are you alone in this, whatever it is?"

She shrugged. "Sure."

"You wouldn't want to tell me anything?"

"I wish I could. I wish I knew more about it. As a matter of fact, Bill, I don't know any more than you do, really."

"What do you mean—really?"

"Well—no," she said. "No. I won't get you mixed up in this. It's my affair. Let me out here."

There was finality in her voice. Bill shrugged, and pulled in to the curb. They'd come into Market Street, and there was a good crowd moving along the sidewalk. Annie got out. She extended a small slim hand.

"So long, Bill," she said with a little smile.

Bill held to the hand. She'd walked into his life a few minutes ago; now he didn't want her to walk out.

"Will I see you again?"

"So long, Bill."

"So long," he said.

She melted into the moving stream of people.

"Taxi!"

IT was a fat man, with a fat woman on his arm. They came running, bouncing as they ran. Bill Werner opened the rear door again.

Then, just as the fat couple arrived, a slim figure slipped through the door ahead of them and slammed it in their faces.

"Now, say—" the man cried.

"You can't do that!" the woman yelled. "We saw it first!"

"Hurry!" Annie said. It was she who had slipped into the cab. "Hurry, Bill! The green car—it's right be-



"Bill! Look, if anything happens to me, take this," the girl said.

Wm. Dutton

hind. I saw it and ran back. and—oh, hurry!"

Bill did the best he could, in the traffic and the fifteen-mile speed limit of the dim-out. He dived into an alley and cut through the block to Mission.

"Bill! Look, if anything happens to me, take this." She handed him a slip of cardboard. "Don't let them have it, no matter what."

Bill turned right on Mission, heading for Market again, but took the mid-block alley, went through, right again, and out Mission once more.

"I don't see them," Annie said, watching out the back window. "Whew! That was close. I'm sorry, Bill. They must have followed your cab. Now you're involved. I didn't want to get you mixed up in it."

"In what?"

"We're to meet somebody at Land's End. I'll tell you what I know on the way."

"You might start by telling me something about yourself," said Bill.

"I think I can sing," she said. "I don't mean croon—I mean sing. So I'm going to be a singer, some day,

and meanwhile I'm a cigarette-girl in the Pago Pago."

"I'm going to be a doctor, and right now I'm driving a taxi," Bill said.

"The Pago Pago is fixed up like the South Seas—rain on a tin roof, potted palms—"

"I know the place."

"Well, I was standing by a palm screen tonight with my cigarette-tray, and I happened to overhear a couple of men talking at a table. The palms hid me, but I could hear. They were talking about meeting somebody at Land's End, and giving them that card I handed to you. It was all very mysterious, and I peeked through the palms, and when I saw the card—well, Bill, I don't know why I did what I did. What do you make of the card?"

BILL WERNER had put the slip of pasteboard in the band of his cap. He held it now in the glow of the dash as he drove slowly along. Frowning, he turned it over.

The piece of flexible cardboard was nothing more nor less than half of a playing-card. The queen of diamonds, torn through the middle. There was no writing upon it, front or back, no marks of any kind. Just the queen of diamonds—rather, half the queen of diamonds.

Bill Werner glanced over his shoulder. "Who's kidding whom?" he asked.

"You see? That's it, Bill. That's the point. These two men were muttering about meeting somebody, and it was this piece of playing-card that seemed so important. I watched them through the palms. One man was thin and sickly-looking, with blue circles around his eyes, and the other was pudgy with a round red face."

"Yes; I met your pals."

"And they had this card, talking about it. And the red-faced one said: 'You wouldn't think half a queen was worth a million bucks, would you, Tee?' Then they both laughed. Then the red-faced man dropped the card. He was sort of clumsy, with stubby fingers, and it fell in his highball. The other man swore, and fished out the card, and they blotted it and then folded a napkin over it to dry it. And then—well, I don't know what made me do what I did."

"You got that napkin," Bill suggested.

"Yes; I got a napkin from another table, and held it with my fingers under the edge of the cigarette-tray. Then I went behind the screen to the table where the two men were, set the tray on the table, dropped the napkin and picked the other one up under the tray. One of the men bought a pack of cigarettes, and I went away. And then—oh, boy! Have you ever been scared? I ran into the dressing-room and put on my street clothes as fast as

I could. I took the Powell car to Market, and then a Muny car, and I was sitting there looking at the queen of diamonds when I happened to notice a green car alongside. And that face—the sallow face—the dark-ringed eyes were watching me as the green car stayed alongside. Bill, I didn't know what to do! I'd read stories, of course. And if a man's shadowed he generally goes into a theater. So I hopped off the car, bought a ticket and ran into the Fox.

"Then as my eyes got used to the dark I saw them. They'd come down the aisle, looking, and then sit down. Pretty soon they'd get up, as if they were going out, and go up the aisles, looking. I knew I'd be seen. So when they were down front I jumped up and ran outside."

"Am I crazy?" Bill Werner asked. Then he shook his head. "But no. If you were giving me a line, it would be a better one. A child of ten could figure up a better one. But look, Annie—why not ring the police in?"

"Why, certainly, Bill—just go to the police station and tell them that a couple of guys are chasing you because you stole half a playing-card. I'm sure they'll be glad to cooperate."

"Yeah; that's right. They'd probably lock us up for molesting an officer."

"And I want this all for myself," the girl declared. "Well—I mean, of course it's half yours, now."

"Half mine? What? You mean you like being chased?"

"I mean the million dollars, silly!" Annie sighed, happily. "We won't have to sell cigarettes or drive a taxi any more, Bill! A half million apiece! Who would think that little piece of cardboard was worth a million!"

Bill Werner's only reply was a small animal-like moan.

FOR a while he drove automatically in the traffic, trying to figure things out. He cut over to Fell and along it to Golden Gate Park. He was through the Panhandle and coming along by the conservatory when the green car came alongside from behind and a revolver looked him in the eye. It was in the stubby fist of the man with the round red face, and it was the same model, snub-nosed and with a big bore, that the fellow's companion had displayed on Divisadero, earlier in the rainy evening.

Werner did an about-face without thinking. He simply jerked his wheel and ducked.

The red-faced man wasn't fooling. He emptied the revolver—one, two, three, four, five! Bill Werner didn't know if he was hit or not; he didn't worry about it right then. The car was bucking as it slithered in its circle off the road. He dodged a tree, nar-

rowly missing it as his tires swung on the slick wet grass. He came onto the asphalt again and gave it all he had. For a while he just turned into any road that provided a fork, and he watched the rear-view mirror for pursuit. When he found he'd shaken them, he headed for the Esplanade, turned north along it up past the Cliff House and to Land's End.

"All right so far, Annie," he said, pulling up at the guard rail. With the rain, nothing could be seen beyond the white-painted rail. From far below came the boom of the breakers.

"Annie!" Bill said sharply. "Annie!" His heart was suddenly tight in his throat. She didn't answer. He'd been so scared and excited, he hadn't so much as thought of the girl since the excitement back in the park. He'd been gunning his old jalopy for all it was worth, and keeping an eye out for headlights behind.

"Annie!"

And then the wet rain drove against the back of his neck. The left-hand door had opened, and the sallow-faced man with the dark-ringed eyes was there.

"We had one more guess, and it paid off," he said. "We're batting a thousand tonight. Give us the dome light."

Werner switched it on. The back seat was empty.

"I'll be kicked in the pants!" the red-faced man cried, from the other side of the taxi. "I'll be kicked square in the pants! She aint here again!"

"I've got an idea about that," the lean man said. "It's one thing to disappear out of a cab, and another thing to appear back in it the way that doll done when we buzzed around the block on Divisadero and followed this heap back. She was in it all the time. Pull out them cushions... Easy, my friend!" he warned as Bill Werner stiffened.

The plump man pulled out the rear seat. His moon face purpled with the exertion. He wrestled with the back cushion, trying to wrest it out by main strength, and finally, happening to pull upward, jerked it out with force enough to flounder against the glass partition between front and back seats.

"All right, pull her out of that trunk!"

The red-faced man stooped, pawing at the trunk. His stubby fingers scratched on the tin.

"There aint no girl here," he announced.

"Don't be a fool! She's a small girl, anyhow!"

"Well, she aint that small!" The red-faced man lighted a match that illuminated the shadow cast by the dome light. The trunk contained

nothing at all but a jack, wrench, and a worn spare tire.

Blinking, Bill Werner looked once again at those inside door-handles that went around and around uselessly at the touch of a finger. As for the trunk, it was locked from the outside.

THE rain beat steadily on the tin roof of the taxi. The sound was good to hear. It was a comforting sound. A solid, down-to-earth sound. Something a man could cling to, to remind himself that he was still on earth and that there must be reality to what was going on.

"They've done it again!" the red-faced man cried. "They've went and done it again!"

"You're a clever pair, my friend," the lean man said. The eyes within the dark circles were hard. "You're a clever pair to have found out and engineered this. You must have planned it to the last detail."

"Oh, yes; certainly," Bill Werner said. "We spent months at it."

"I thought so. And where'd you get wise to the queen of diamonds? How did you get wind of that, brother?"

Bill acted mysterious. "How did you?"

The sallow cheeks puffed. "You fool! We'll get that card! I'll give you just ten seconds, brother! Ten seconds!"

He began counting. A bit too fast for seconds. He had the stubby gun a few inches from Bill's left ear. Bill tried to think. There was no time to think. Thinking is a luxury of leisure.

"You win," he said, when the count was seven. "The girl's got the card. I'll take you to her."

"Put the cushions back," the lean man ordered his pal. When that was done, the two men got inside.

"No funny stuff, brother," the lean man warned. "We've had a sample of your smartness, and I'll take no more chances. The first false move will be the last."

Bill started the motor, gunned it, saying: "Don't you think I know when I'm licked?"

He let out the clutch, motor roaring, and the taxi jumped ahead as if some great foot had booted it.

The pair in the rear were flung back against the cushions. The lean man's revolver went off, throwing a brief lick of flame toward the roof. Then the two men went forward against the glass partition as the taxi smashed into the guard-rail. They scrambled in a tangle as the taxi lurched ahead again, bumping over the broken rail. And then, just as the car reached the lip of the precipice, they realized what was up, and they yelled.

Hanging to the wheel with one hand and the door-handle with the other, Bill Werner stayed to the last instant and scrambled out, lighting on hands and knees in the muck, just in time. The taxi hung on the lip of the precipice by its undercarriage, as the front wheels went off. It balanced there, swaying. The men inside were screaming. They were clawing with bare hands at the glass. They were vainly turning those loose door-handles around and around.

WITH a deliberate slowness, the car tilted forward, dropped about a foot with a sudden jerk, hesitated, and then with a squeal of tearing metal went over.

Bill Werner remained on hands and knees while the car gave four enormous groans as it struck going down; then there was a last metallic shriek, and silence but for the dull boom of the surf far below, and the steady patter of the rain.

Bill Werner crawled on hands and knees to the broken guard-rail. Then he felt safe to stand up. He stood there in the night rain. He had just sent two men to death. He had twice come through with his own life by the narrowest of margins. There was the mystery of Annie Laurie's disappearance.

Yet he thought of the thing nearest his heart.

"Complete wreck," he muttered, "and not a dime's worth of crash insurance."

He began walking. A dim shape loomed. It was the green car. He opened the door and felt of the unfamiliar dash. Yes, keys still in. He'd drive to the police station, and say, "Gentlemen, I've just killed two men."

They would ask, "Why, pray tell?"

And he would say, "Because of one-half of the queen of diamonds." They would, then, naturally, understand everything and he would be released for acting in self-defense. Oh, yes, certainly.

But he couldn't just forget it. The bodies were in his taxi. Under such circumstances it is best to tell a story, however fantastic, rather than to wait until you are answering questions.

Bill Werner climbed into the green car. Then he switched on the dome light and took the half card from his cap band. A bit of thinking might be in order. It was not, now, a mere thing of interesting mystery. It was his neck. What was there about that torn half of the queen of diamonds?

He looked at it front, he looked at it back. He held it to the light. He felt it for nicks or bumps.

Finally he just held it in his hand and stared at it numbly.

It was nothing, absolutely nothing, but half of an ordinary playing-card.

And then a voice said, "You have displayed it quite enough, thank you. Now I shall see."

If one more thing was needed to complete the evening, this was it. A face was at the car window. It was more than a face. It was practically an essay entitled, "How to Recognize a German Agent at a Glance." It was a square, beefy face, bull-necked, and there was even a monocle in the right eye. The owner of the face slid into the seat alongside Werner. A carbon copy slid in at the opposite side, while three other men climbed into the rear seat. The men were dressed in black slickers; with their heads ducked they couldn't have been seen a yard away in the rain.

"You were very clever," the man with the spy face said. "Very clever! I congratulate you! The manner in which you eliminated those two pigs was beautiful. Don't you think so, men?"

The others echoed the thought.

"We were ready to come to your aid, but you needed no help from us!" the leader said, and he laughed. The carbon copies laughed.

"And now a mere formality," the leader said. He took the half queen

of diamonds from Werner's limp palm and produced another half from his own person. He set the pieces together. The four men examined the result closely.

"They match perfectly!" the leader said. "Something which all science cannot duplicate—the irregular tear of a piece of paper. You are the man. And now the plans, and we shall deliver the money!"

"Oh!" Bill Werner said. "Why—er, yes, certainly. The plans! Of course! There are *always* the plans!"

"Indeed!"

"But aren't you forgetting one thing?" Werner asked.

"One thing? What?"

Bill Werner gulped. He hadn't the vaguest idea about what was going on.

"Ha-ha!" cried one of the carbon copies. "The password! That is it!"

"Yes, the password!" the leader gasped. "All right, if you insist, give us the password!"

"Give—you mean, *me* give you the password?"

"Why, certainly," chuckled the leader. "Go ahead if you insist."

Werner forced a laugh. "Well, after all, I've had my little joke!"

"Oh, come, now; come," the leader urged. "After all, it is part of the regulations. I thank you for reminding me."

"I was just joking."

"But surely, you cannot joke about regulations! Come, the password!"

Bill Werner, at this moment, knew he was at the absolute end of his tether. He didn't know what the soup was made of, but he was in it and he didn't like the flavor.

IF the next day had been Sunday, the headlines would have been folded inside the comics. The next day, however, was Thursday, and the headlines, big and black, shouted:

SPY RING NABBED!

NAZI AGENTS TRAPPED BY
NIGHT-CLUB GIRL AND
CAB DRIVER!

MILITARY PLANS FOUND ON
BODIES AT LAND'S END!

There were lesser headlines. There was a picture of Annie Laurie in the fetchingly brief costume she wore while peddling cigarettes in the Pago Pago. There was a picture of Bill Werner peering through a microscope at a tissue slide, wearing a laboratory



smock, and one of him wearing his taxi-driver's uniform, with one foot on the running-board of a cab borrowed for the occasion. There was a picture of Bill and Annie with great big smiles, hugging one another.

BILL and Annie read the headlines together in a lunch wagon. They were the only ones in the lunch wagon besides the old gent behind the counter. The reason they were the only ones was obvious, at the first sip of the coffee.

"The pictures aren't bad," Bill said, "except the one where we're together. Now, let's go over the thing again. Those two guys who chased us all night had some plans which are so military we don't even know what we saved."

"Check," Annie said.

"And they were to identify themselves with that torn half card which would match the other half of the queen of diamonds."

"Check."

"So that they couldn't establish contact when you stole the napkin with the card inside it. They couldn't collect a penny without that card. And to appear without it would only be to risk their necks, for they'd be suspected as somebody setting a trap."

"Check."

"But I don't think, really, that they were going to get any million dollars."

Annie wrinkled her nose in compromise. "Well, they'd been drinking, or they wouldn't have talked loud enough for me to hear them in the first place. You know night-club liquor."

"Well, they were probably counting future profits. So far as anybody can tell, this was their first job. They were counting some unhatched chickens that would come forth after this first deal was in the bag."

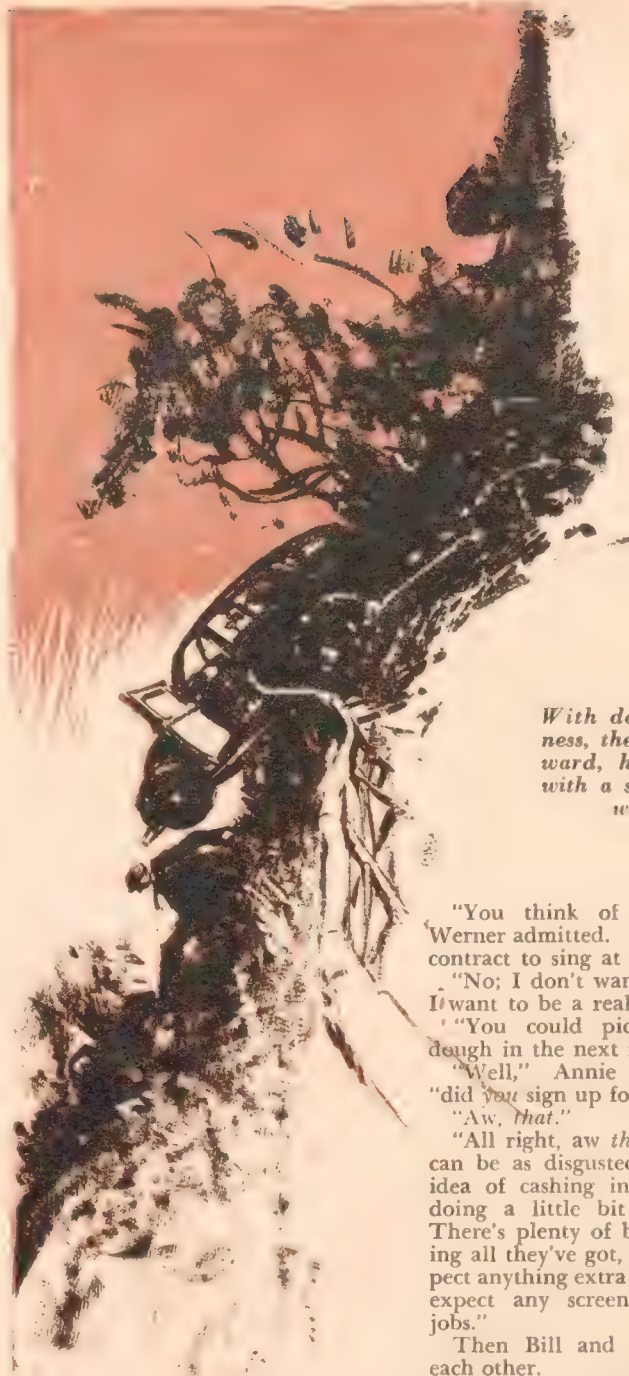
"I think," Annie said, "that is a mixed metaphor—but, check."

"But what I can't see, is how the devil you got out of that cab?"

"Well, when you turned into Fell Street and headed for the park, and I saw that that infernal green sedan had somehow kept on our tail despite everything—well, heck, Bill, I'm not used to this. I guess I lost my nerve. I figured it was time to call the cops. So I just hopped out when you stopped for an arterial, and I guess it was none too soon. It took some tall talking to convince the police I wasn't crazy, but they finally sent a car to Land's End."

"And they arrived in time's nick, to coin a phrase," Bill admitted. "But that doesn't say how you got out of my cab."

"Why, goodness, I just rolled the window down and opened the door with the outside handle."



With deliberate slowness, the car tilted forward, hesitated, then with a squeal of metal went over.

"You think of everything," Bill Werner admitted. "Did you take that contract to sing at the night-club?"

"No; I don't want to be a crooner. I want to be a real singer."

"You could pick up some easy dough in the next few months."

"Well," Annie said defensively, "did you sign up for that screen test?"

"Aw, that."

"All right, aw *that*! I guess a girl can be as disgusted as a boy at the idea of cashing in on—well, sort of doing a little bit for the country. There's plenty of boys out there giving all they've got, and they don't expect anything extra for it. They don't expect any screen tests or singing jobs."

Then Bill and Annie grinned at each other.

"Nope," the old gent behind the counter, said, leaning way back and peering far-sightedly at the newspaper. "That picture of the pair of you together aint so good."

"Well, we can try it again," Bill said.

They tried it again.

The old gent eyed them in each other's arms, and shook his head in memory of fifty years ago.

"Yep, you've got it now," he said. "That's something like it."

"Oh," Bill said. "But—the window was *up* when we looked for you and you'd vanished."

"Certainly. I rolled it back up before I hopped out, so you wouldn't get rain on the upholstery."

When Jim Blackdaw the pearl fisher heard of the torpedoing—and of the English girl—he did something about it.

ALMOST all of the passengers and crew were saved when the P. & O. steamer *Khartoum* was torpedoed and sunk. The capsizing of a lifeboat resulted in the loss of four—a passenger, the second engineer and two of the black gang. The passenger, a girl of twenty, was on her way to Aden from Calcutta. Her father, a cotton and seed merchant and mill-owner, had wanted her out of India—what with the Japs on one hand and Gandhi civil disorder on the other. Because of his social standing in the Bombay presidency, the loss of his daughter was given wide publicity.

A hundred and fifty miles from the scene of the sinking the pearl fisherman, Jim Blackdaw, heard what had happened to the girl. The news of the U-boat operating as far up as the Arabian Sea had driven small craft into the Gulf of Aden, and Blackdaw met one of the refugees—a large, double-ended craft with lateen rig and high poop, an Arab dhow. Hassim-el-bar, the owner, had handled goat-skins, sheep and civet; but with the Italians chased out of Eritrea, he was now supplying bad liquor and worse tobacco to the Americans and to British factories, repair-depots and hangars. He was also something of a pearl-buyer, and it was for this reason that Blackdaw hailed him.

Sailing a smaller sambuk, Blackdaw came alongside. It turned out that he was only allowed to board the dhow on this particular encounter because Hassim, who had known him for years, believed he was an Arab. Monsoons and the Red Sea sun had burned Jim Blackdaw to a dark hue, and his real name had gone long since, with his complexion.

He sat with Hassim on the poop where they had coffee and anisette and pastry dusted with sugar. Both approached the transaction with indifference, according to Arab custom. They talked of the weather, the storm, the muddy water which would attract the rays. This got them very naturally, on the subject of pearls. The rays, Blackdaw said, meant more pearls, since it was their excretion which formed the cysts in the oysters.

At that very moment Blackdaw saw a lifebelt on a hatch and the name of the steamship *Khartoum* stenciled on the canvas.



"You were near the scene of the U-boat attack?"

Hassim puffed at his long cigarette-holder. He was an Arab to the core—benign and bearded, and wearing a fez and alpaca coat—but he had a veneer of the Occident, an excellent command of English, a wrist-watch, and a phonograph that ground out, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," instead of the eternal thrum of a tamboura down forward with the Somali crew.

"I was taking a cargo to Massua. Yes, the British patrols are everywhere, since that U-boat sneaked up here. I thought taking Madagascar would make these waters safe."

Before they got back to the business at hand, Blackdaw glanced over the break of the poop, attracted by a succinct flash of sunlight on red hair. A white girl had just stepped out of a door of the cabin below them.

Hassim jumped up. "Look here, memsahibi!" he said in English. "You should be in bed. This sun will kill you after what you've been through.

Please!" He called to his cabin servant. "A fan, a drink! I told you to watch her, son of two pigs!"

The girl went back submissively, Blackdaw getting one glimpse of her—slim, nerve-shattered, deathly white.

Hassim lumbered up to the poop again, puffing. He screwed a cheroot into the long holder and said: "Now then, we were talking about what?"

"Who is she?"

Hassim saw Blackdaw's eyes fixed on the lifebelt. He smoked a long time before answering; then, in order that the helmsman and other deckhands could not listen, he spoke in English.

"My friend, I will tell you something. We like each other, otherwise I would not have let you come aboard. It shows how I trust you and like you."

This was a pretty left-handed compliment, for Hassim really meant that Blackdaw was something of a crook and would wink at things. He was partially right. Blackdaw had once been mate for a tobacco-smuggler,

to Mocha

by KENNETH PERKINS



who had picked him up after a fight in a Suez grog-shop—admiring his six feet of iron brawn, as well as his lightning-quick eyes and his temper. When the tobacco-smuggler went in for pearl-thieving and the smuggling of Galla tribesmen as slaves into Yemen, Blackdaw cut the partnership. But it was too late; both were caught and imprisoned by the French at Djibouti. He was only a boy then who had come to sea, shipping as pantryman at Belfast. He had no friends. He was frightened—and not without cause. He hadn't a chance to clear himself. He killed a native guard and escaped.

WHEN five years later he came back to the Red Sea, knowing how to make money in pearls, he came as an Arab. But a scar he had got from that Suez fight might some day betray him. Right now, it gave him a fixed savage look. He was handsome and also very ugly—a point of doubt. But there was no doubt about his body. He wore only dungarees now on Hassim's deck, and his torso, being nude, flashed like hammered brass.

"You are one man who can put yourself in my place," Hassim said affably. "You know how it feels to find a pearl. I found her not far from where the P. & O. boat was torpedoed. I'd just cleared from Mukalla, you know."

"Taking her to Aden, I suppose?"

"Certainly I'm not taking her to Aden. Why should I do that?"

"The P. & O. was a British boat. And I heard you talk to her in English."

"I'm discharging my cargo at Massua. Business is brisk, thanks to Mussolini letting the Yanks and Britishers run the country."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Hassim shrugged his fat shoulders. "She's been in bed ever since we picked her up. She was in the water for many hours. My supercargo was an apothecary at Assab once; he's given her medicine and made it clear that she must not be excited. She is very excitable, although cultured in the curious way of Englishwomen. She has a mother and two sisters in the British Isles, at a town called Paisley. She speaks French, a little Italian, and talks about my phonograph-records with a musicianly understanding. She's very happy when talking to me."

"But why take her into the Red Sea? Djibouti is the nearest port. You could turn her over to the Port Authorities."

"What for?"

Jim Blackdaw checked the gasp in his throat. He said with his mouth open and full of motionless smoke:

"Is that what she wanted?"

"What do you mean, 'Is that what she wanted?' I don't understand what you're talking about."

"I don't see, Hassim, how you can take her anywhere against her will."

"What will? She has no will in this business. She belongs to me."

"How do you figure that out, my friend?" Blackdaw asked carefully.

"This law the white men have. We have it too. She's salvage; legally I can claim her. There'll be no trouble about that. I expect no lawsuit over the rightful ownership."

"You'll have something worse than a lawsuit, Hassim, if the British at Massua hear about it."

"Really?" He raised his brows as if surprised. Of course he knew this all along, but it did not concern his conscience.

"In fact, if they find out what you are doing, you'll be hanged."

"Well, I declare! I thought they were all busy fighting Germans and Japs, not Arabs. Of course I'm not flaunting this business in any white

man's face. I've noticed the Britishers have rather peculiar ideas about women. But hanging—that's putting it pretty strong."

"The best way out of it, since you have no time to stop at Aden, is for you to turn her over to me. I can take her to the nearest British port."

HASSIM'S alpaca coat wrinkled and shook as if puffed with a breeze. Ripples went up his fat torso, forcing little chuckles out of his beard.

"You're a sly one! A good one, a regular jackal! You wanted her all along. I should have known it."

"I mean everything I say. If you keep this woman, it means you're going to sell her to some Turk. I tell you you'll be hanged, Hassim, in any port in the Red Sea you run for!"

The chuckles stopped as if turned off by a faucet, and the big bland eyes hardened.

"How shall I be hanged—when no one will ever hear about it? She must have been reported lost. I heard of the *Khartoum* being torpedoed from a Djibouti trader who says the list of survivors is published everywhere. No one will be looking for her. She will not be missed, for she is already among the missing. She went down in the Arabian Sea. She doesn't exist any more."

The scar on Blackdaw's face kindled, and his barrel chest heaved for breath.

Hassim, innocent as a child, gentle as an old grandfather, smiled as he went on: "So what do you mean, I'll be hanged? You'll excuse me for saying so, but I think you have motives of your own—alarming me this way." He resorted to righteous anger. "I welcome you and you're a friend. But I won't be put upon. You can't take this salvage right out of my hands, for all your threats. The girl is mine."

Blackdaw considered another threat. But it might be an irritation. He could not back up any threat of his own. He had four pairs of pearl-divers—eight Sudanese; he had his skipper and agent, both Arabs; and he had a Somali boy to bake the *dhurra* bread and do the cooking. None of them would lift a finger in a fight of this purpose. What guns he had aboard were for fighting possible Axis raiders, but not for Arab fishermen pirates in small *zarugs*. His crew would fight

to save pearls, not to save a white woman, or to steal her from a man who rightfully owned her. Hassim had twenty-five men and a machine-gun, for he always carried plenty of cash for his transactions. If Blackdaw showed fight Hassim would make short shrift of sinking his little sambuk, and drowning his crew.

"If this thing leaks out, Hassim—"

"You said that once!" Hassim waved his hand petulantly. "Let's change the subject." But he came back to it himself: "Your crew won't talk?"

"No, of course not. They're pearl-divers; what business is it of theirs? I'll tell them there was no woman on board."

He made this point very clear, for the simple reason that if there had been doubt about it, Blackdaw knew he would never get back to his own boat or see grass again.

"As for the girl, she is very happy at her deliverance," Hassim said genially. "I have treated her like my own flesh and blood. I asked her what records she would like me to pick out for the cabin boy to play, and she chose the one you hear now."

THE fellow was absolutely without guile. He was doing no wrong. In his trade with the British he had absorbed none of their philosophy except that of barter. Their silver was his business, not their gods. The British on the north shores of the Red Sea had ideas about women, the Danakil on the south shores their ideas about the Voodoo Dambala and Papa Legba—both were inconsequential in Hassim's business and morality. He got slightly impatient.

"Look here, anyway: I don't like to be called a lawbreaker. If I were one of these louse-ridden fishermen who go in for piracy, I would go through your boat and take your pearls. You never thought of that, did you?"

"Of course I never thought of it. Don't be talking like that."

"And here you say I'm doing something I might be hanged for! It isn't polite, such talk, and I don't like it. You are my guest. . . . Let's forget it before this gets to be an altercation."

The Somali who acted as cabin boy stirred anisette into their coffee.

"Did you get any mother-of-pearl in your catch?" Hassim asked breezily. "I might have a market for it even though it's not a strategic mineral." He laughed. "Or did you fish for bilbil oysters only?"

Blackdaw puffed fast at his smoke. He was trying to weigh the chances of putting into the nearest port and sending a British destroyer or at least a patrol-boat after the dhow. The chance was a bad one. No one would ever see or hear of the girl again. They would do the same with her as the



slave-smugglers do even to this day when a French patrol stands over for them or an Italian patrol before the war. They would throw all evidence overboard.

"I fished for *sudaf* oysters, so there is mother-of-pearl," he said. "Have you got thirty thousand rupees to spend?"

"Of course I haven't thirty thousand rupees. Don't be telling jokes."

"We could make a trade," Blackdaw said casually.

"Interested in cutlery or civet?"

"What do you want for the girl?"

Hassim's shoulders began to tremble again with chuckles. "You are a pretty sly fox! You frighten me first about keeping her. You make her appear something that is not worth possessing, leading up to this barter. You pearl-divers learn tricks because it's a thieving business. Why didn't you come right out with it honestly in the first place?"

Blackdaw said without heat: "Agree on a price; then I'll pay you in pearls." He knew ahead of time that he was going to be fleeced; he realized he was actually paying a ransom for the girl, but he could not let Hassim get this view of it. Ransom money could be gotten back. Hence this must appear a *bona-fide* sale.

"Let me see your pearls."

"Let me see the woman."

"So you can regard her points of conformation?" Hassim laughed. "I suppose that is the routine."

Blackdaw could hardly believe what was happening. He found himself in the extraordinary position—close to the modern steamship convoy routes with British men-of-war on every horizon—of buying a white woman as a slave!

"Does she feel like coming on deck a moment?" Hassim asked his one-time apothecary. Yes, she had wanted to walk on deck in the freshness of the monsoon. "At least put this chair here," Hassim said with a gentle

change to his voice, "and let her sit down when the purchaser makes his estimate."

They brought her up, holding her by the arm. Her red hair was covered now with the blue headdress common to Dankali women, a square of cotton cloth folded in sharp angles so that a flat fold settled on top of her head. It was like a cap and gown, because of the full-length skirt of black thickly embroidered with silver. Her eyes were as dark and glaring as if ringed with kohl.

Hassim said: "I will sell her for forty thousand rupees."

Her eyes darted wildly to the scarred stranger who had come aboard.

"It is the first time she has shown any fear since I saved her," Hassim said with sympathy. "Look. This is a young man," he said to her. "Why are you afraid of him? I'm selling you to him if he can meet the price. Rather a rough-looking customer, perhaps, but being a dangerous fighter he's never molested by these fishermen pirates. A great protector for you, memsahib."

It was easy for Blackdaw to get her point of view. She had been saved from death by this man Hassim. They said some of those nine-foot sharks had been hanging around her, but like any sharks they were too timorous to approach as long as she kept swimming. Nevertheless the sight of them was horrifying enough. When Hassim hove to in his big dhow and picked her out of that mess, he was like an angel from heaven.

Furthermore, they had treated her very well, as all appearances indicated. The middle-aged Hassim had a gentle voice, a genial patriarchal face. She had been given hot drinks, clean dry clothes, the usual grass mattress to sleep on. They had even spread a Tadjoura mat for her feet here on deck. She had been fed and, after a fashion, entertained. They let her choose what pieces she wanted on that phonograph, what spices in her coffee. Modern dance music instead of the weird bone-tingling savagery of the tamboura had soothed her nerves. She was not in savage hands. She could see no heat in Hassim's eyes and, truth to tell, there was none.

UNTIL this moment Hassim had treated her as precious merchandise which must be carefully packed and hidden and protected. She took it for granted that they would put her ashore at the nearest port. And this was the awakening: a scarred wind-browned man with thick jet brows—a ruffian who needed a shave and some clothes that were not salt-stained and torn. Here was a young man like the fore-castle rats on P. & O. steamships, staring at her with hot eyes.

Of course Blackdaw could not help that heat in his eyes. She stirred him to the last fiber. He had been forced into the position of an Oriental buying a young slave, and there were thrills to it which he could not hide.

He smiled at her—and this was very unfortunate.

"Is the price satisfactory?" Hassim asked, rubbing his hands.

Blackdaw fumed, burning his cheek down. "Why start with a price only a hashish-eater would name?" he snorted. Since this must be a *bona-fide* transaction he knew he would have to go through with it in the usual manner, by first belittling the merchandise. He could tell her later that it was all play-acting. "The girl is five years older than any man in your tribe would look at. I wouldn't pay five hundred rupees for her."

"But the red hair!"

"That means truculence. Why should I pay for truculence?"

The girl sank against the rattan deck-chair, her hands turned upward in passive dismay. Her eyes riveted on Blackdaw were dazed.

He said: "She is a gaunt thing with scrawny hands and ankles. She is not *klub moti*—beautifully fat."

"Then let us arrive at an intermediate price somewhere."

"All right; five hundred rupees."

Hassim shook his head. "I'm not a *hawkah!* And this is not a *hawkah's* bumboat peddling to Aden tourists. But I'll come down to thirty-nine thousand."

"Oh, so you want all my pearls—and for this sickly thing here?" Blackdaw grinned dryly. He had been through this ritual many times with pearl-brokers and knew the futility of hurry, as well as the necessity of calling each other names. "One thousand—not a rupee more."

"This man," Hassim laughed angrily, turning to the white-faced girl, "is known in every port of the Red Sea as a scoundrel and a corsair. When he speaks our language he has the accent of a Bedouin. I'm not sure but that he might *be* one—which is the worst thing I can call him." He spat and shook his fists. They might have been friends a moment ago, but not now. "He offers a thousand! What did I tell you? He's the worst cutthroat between Suez and Bombay! How did he get that scar, I ask you? I'll make it thirty-five thousand."

For an hour she sat there and heard her future owner delineated with vivid adjectives. It was easy to believe them all. Even if he were but one-half as bad as he was painted, he was blacker than any human being she had ever heard of in story or song. Her first opinion of him was borne out to the nicety of each insult. A pariah among his brown-skinned kind.

Hassim got down to a certain price and Blackdaw realized that there was a finality about it: fifteen thousand. He was certain there was no further compromise because the price happened to be what his own skipper and agent had computed as the worth of the pearls. Somehow Hassim had found this out. One of his men, doubtless, listening to the gup between the two crews as the boats lay alongside, had signaled to him. Any further bargaining was a waste of time and Blackdaw was anxious to end the girl's torture by telling her what this farce was all about. He went aboard his own boat, and returned with the pearls in an ebony box.

HASSIM spread the contents out with a spatula. He ordered more coffee and anisette. He handed the girl a cup, but she did not drink.

"Too bad," he said, "that I had to sell you to such a disreputable buyer, but—" He shrugged his shoulders and looked to the red sky, muttering something about the ninety-nine beautiful names of God.

Separating the pearls that were of good orient and luster into a pile and weighing them, Hassim announced that the amount was hardly sufficient. But the seed pearls, the dust which would be sold for mother-of-pearl, might be a consideration.

As Blackdaw had expected, they cleaned him out to the last piece. "Take the whole works and be damned!" he said.

As the shells were brought aboard, Hassim said: "I'd like a receipt, if you don't mind, showing that I paid for these pearls in rupees."

"Are you afraid I'll bring suit against you to recover?" Blackdaw exclaimed.

"Not a bit. I believe you would find it awkward to resort to law. I

hear you avoid certain ports—the British at Aden, the Fench at Djibouti; you even avoided the station at As-sab in the bygone days of Mussolini. You come to me at sea to sell your wares instead of going to a pearl broker. If you try to recover these pearls I might be tempted to have your past investigated. You may be a Parsi or a Hindu for all I know. Your accent doesn't fool me; perhaps it's because you spoke some minor dialect of Oman when you were a child, as you say. The matter never bothered me before, of course. I don't bother about a customer's past."

"Then why the receipt?"

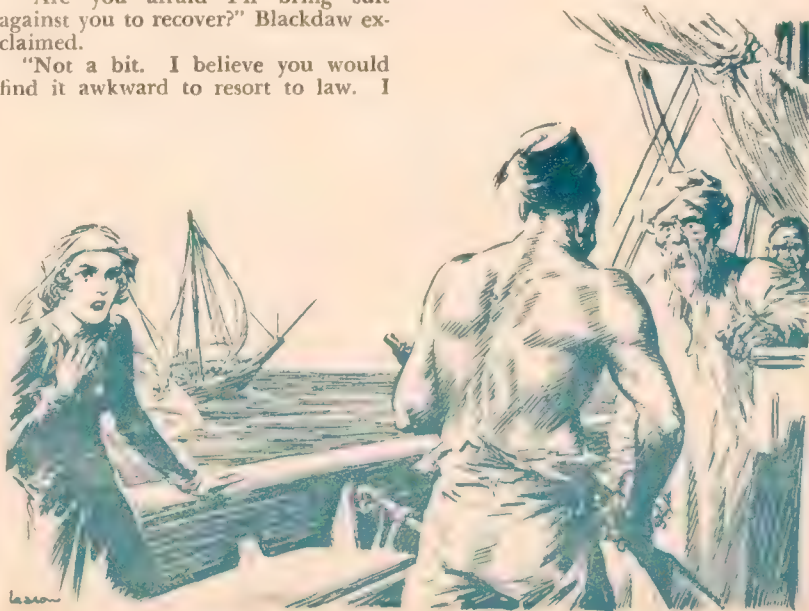
"In case the girl runs away from you and tells that I sold her. I would have many witnesses to prove that her accusation is libel. But then a receipt would help."

Blackdaw wrote it.

Then he stepped to his purchase, reaching for her. "There now, take it easy," he whispered. He tried to encourage her with a smile as he touched her shoulder. "I'll explain everything in a minute. You see, I—"

The hard frantic blow of her hand on his mouth stopped him. He should have explained first, instead of smiling, he thought. He had a cornered tigress on his hands, that was his second thought. His anger actually came very slowly. As he stood there gaping, not troubling to wipe his mouth, the burn of the slap spread through his blood.

"Get away from here!" she said in a cool deadly voice. "Don't come near me. Don't talk to me!" Her voice shuddered with her throat and



Blackdaw, gun in hand, asked, "Why haven't you made sail?"

Illustrated by
Percy Leason



The hard frantic blow of her hand on his mouth stopped him.

shoulders as she gasped, "You grinning beast!"

The crew of the dhow stood in complete silence. If they had been white men they might have snickered. But this was too serious. A woman striking her rightful purchaser was an enormity. She would be flogged.

THE girl must have sensed that fearful tension in the air, for she was suddenly terrified at what she had done. She made no protest when she was led to the rail and lifted over to the deck of the sambuk. She was dazed—a strange confusion was in her mind, due to that hand clamped on her wrist, which was gentle even though it was like steel. This new possessor was inescapable, but he was also forbearing. He did not act like an Arab whose slave had struck him before a crowd of witnesses. She remembered only the sardonic stiffening of his lip.

Old Hassim, she reflected, had sold her—hence he was as bad as the buyer. She was glad at least to get off that dhow. But apparently she had gotten off one spot to find herself on another which was worse. The dhow was luxurious compared to this sambuk. The deck of the smaller boat was slimy with fish oil with which the planks were protected from the shriveling heat. The *dhurra* that the cook had baked was fermented as the Sudanese crew likes it. And the crew itself was smeared with rancid butter because of the heat. The whole outfit smelled as if a camel were aboard.

"You see it was all a joke," Blackdaw said the very moment they cast off and the big dhow set sail and moved away from them. He ordered his cook boy to bring two brandy pawnees. "You can relax now," he said to her. "You're safe. I had to buy you, you see, but I'm putting you ashore at Djibouti—the nearest port."

She saw the native skipper behind him give a sly grin, his brown face wrinkling like a burned orange. Blackdaw caught the reflection of that grin in the girl's eyes, which turned hard and smart. He whirled on the skipper. "What do you want?"

The skipper said quickly: "The divers want to know how much Hassim paid you for the pearls, so they may compute their share."

"No time to talk about that now," Blackdaw said, badgered. "Make sail!"

He saw the Sudanese huddled up forward, muttering together, their eyes turning to him, scowling. They had been cheated, they thought, because their master had lost his head over this white woman. There would be lots of trouble at Djibouti. And this girl was certainly in the mood to make as much extra trouble as possible. He went below to get a gun.

As the skipper called forward to the man to make sail, the girl turned to him.

"Why did you laugh when he said he was putting me ashore?"

"Because he is lying."

"He's not lying! He's taking me to the nearest port. He won't dare do anything else. Who are you, anyway, to be talking?"

"I am the master of this vessel. The man who bought you is the owner of it. And he's a thief and a robber if ever there was one."

The skipper spoke from his heart. He meant every word. And the reason was this: There is a long-established custom in the selling of pearls. The divers appoint a representative who consults with the boat-owner, the skipper and the *serinj* or agent. The boat-owner is entitled to half the proceeds, the skipper gets his pay, the agent half as much, the divers divide what is left. In this case the custom of generations was ruthlessly ignored. Blackdaw had spent the whole amount to buy a girl, and there was not one man in the crew but believed he bought her for himself. The idea that he had spent fifteen thousand rupees for her merely to turn her over to the authorities at Djibouti was ridiculous on the face of it. They knew he did not like the authorities at Djibouti.

AS the skipper told the girl all this he could not understand why she had any doubts about her status. But she said:

"You're lying as much as he. I'd rather believe him."

The skipper shrugged. "You have eyes and ears. But believe that lie too! You will probably be flogged for striking him. But what affair is all this of mine, anyway?"

Blackdaw came on deck with his gun.

"Why haven't you made sail?" he demanded.

"The crew will not take orders until they know how they are to be paid. They risked their lives in the diving, and some are old men—past thirty."

"Tell them I'll sell my boat. It goes to you and the *serinj* and the divers. The boat and guns and gear will be more than you'd have got from the pearls."

"But—"

Blackdaw's brown hand slid eloquently to his gun. The skipper went forward hurriedly.

The cook boy brought two brandy pawnees and a bottle, which he set on a bumbux, in front of the girl. When Blackdaw sat down opposite her, she got up and went to the farthest rail.

He gulped his pawnee, then poured brandy from the bottle and drank it neat. He might tell this girl that his name was really Jim Blackdaw, that he was a Britisher, mostly Irish and Scotch. But she would probably ask the skipper if this were true; and the latter, not to mention the crew, would be glad enough to hear such an en-

lightening bit of news, and use it to their own ends. The girl was in no state of mind to be entrusted with secrets anyway. He remembered that slap. She would know the whole truth at one stroke—when she was given to the British Consul at Djibouti; until then, let the little catamount think what she wanted.

Of course she could only think one thing, he reflected. She was a captive. He was an "Arab," and one who had committed a crime in his past which made him something of an outlaw. His own crew was maligning him. She had seen him barter for her with another Arab, and buy her. Every appearance was against him. Every mouth would belie him. He said nothing until the skipper came aft to ask where they were to stand for.

"Djibouti."

The skipper swallowed. "What for?" He glanced at the bottle from which the master must have been drinking too deep.

"To put this woman ashore, of course," Blackdaw said in English.

"I don't know what you mean." The skipper poked at his turban as if trying to get something into his head. He was considerate enough to use English also, lest the crew hear what he had to say next. "You've told me many times if we ever touched at Djibouti you might be recognized for some past offense."

"I'll take the chance."

"Why don't you put back to Mocha? You are safe in Mocha. In Djibouti you may be hanged."

"Mocha will take too long. This girl wouldn't spend two nights on this boat. We'd have a catfight, or else she'd throw herself by the board. Stand for Djibouti."

The skipper still gaped. "I can not understand. You bought her. You took all the pearls, which will be trouble enough for you. You will have to sell your boat to pay us. The whole transaction leaves you on the beach. You give your all, and then you turn her loose!"

Again Blackdaw's hand crept to his gun.

The skipper shook his head, utterly aghast, and again went forward.

The girl was staring, open-mouthed. She made no move when Blackdaw held one of the cups of brandy pawnee to her. She ignored it and kept her eyes riveted on him. Then:

"Since when do Arabs drink brandy?" she asked in a queer voice.

His eyes gave her a quick flick and dropped.

An Arab purchasing a slave just to turn her over to the Consul! That was good! It was so incredible, indeed that the girl thought it over for a long time before arriving at a conclusion. She could only arrive at it

when she was sure that this man meant what he said about Djibouti. There were other things that did not count so much—this Arab who talked English to another one, who let her slap his mouth with impunity, who had a past, who had committed some crime years ago in a French port, who drank hard liquor, taking one cup after another like a Scotch sailor.

None of these things was proof enough. But one deed was clear: He had paid ransom for her—and he was letting her go! What Arab would do that? What Englishman, taken by and large, would do anything else?

LUCKILY they picked up the first landfall at sunset, for the Ras Bir light, always the landfall before the war, no longer swept the sea. As they stood into Tadjoura Gulf, purple land reached around them possessively from all sides. The girl gasped at the hot shore wind and said: "If you are afraid of going into this port, why don't you put me off in one of these dugouts and let them take me ashore?"

"When my divers already have the notion that you are worth a lot of money? I'm taking you ashore myself, to the Consul."

She gasped again at the heat and spice in the air. "A lot of trouble, it seems to me."

"Quite a lot." He took another drink.

"That Arab skipper said you were on the beach because of buying me."

"I've been there before."

They stood in closer, with the dark shapes of the twin islands of Moucha and Maskali close aboard. She saw him straining forward, trying to stare at the blacked-out freighters. In that vast space of darkness only one light winked low on the water and this, according to the helmsman, might be a patrol.

Blackdaw emptied his cup, but hers stood on the bumbox untouched. Although he had turned from her, she went on:

"You must have heard, I suppose, that my father's a merchant in Bombay."

"I heard very little about you, except you have a mother and two sisters. I don't even know your name."

"My name's Edith Buckminster."

He shrugged, as if her name was of no special importance. He did not bother to tell her his.

"My father is in Bombay. He has given me up for lost—"

"You'll see your father again. The Consul will arrange all that."

"That's not what I'm worrying about. I mentioned my father because I want you to know that he will be anxious to see you and thank you for saving his daughter."

He did not seem impressed. "I doubt if I'll ever meet your father."

"You mean you're staying out of the way of the English too?" she exclaimed. "What was your crime?"

He told her about the Djibouti prison and the guard he had killed. She studied him tensely. Evidently she was more interested in the way he talked, than in the purport of his statement.

"There's something about your accent," she said, "that reminds me of home."

"Oh, yes, Paisley."

"It's not a brogue—although it sounds a little like they talk in Kintyre or Arran."

"Yes, I know Kintyre and Arran." She was getting close; so close that she might say Belfast in the next breath. "You've sailed the North Channel?" he asked, grinning. "And the Firth of Clyde?"

"My father had a yawl when we were children. It's funny how this brings it all back, sailing with you on this boat—and you an Arab!"

His eyes flicked away, and she burst out suddenly: "Don't go into Djibouti and get caught! I heard your men say that Mocha would be safe for you."

"I told you why that wouldn't work."

"I know—because of me; I wouldn't stay on a boat with a piratical young Arab who had bought me for one of his wives. You were right, I wouldn't."

She reached for the brandy pawnee. "But if it'll save you from being caught, I'll sail to Mocha with you."

He turned to her, astonished, his eyes hot and phosphorescent in the dark. Her eyes gave an answering flash of excitement.

"You can sell your boat there," she hurried on. "But without a boat, what can you do?"

"Start again. There are more pearls in the Red Sea. And I've been thinking for a long time—if there was some way of getting into the war without being fingerprinted—"

"If you could start as yourself instead of as a fugitive chased around these Red Sea ports—"

He looked over to her in the dark. Trained to see in the queer dark above blue water, he knew that her lips were open, half smiling, wondering.

"It would be worth starting again—if I could be myself, without the British bucking me."

"My father will arrange that. To my father and to me you won't be just an Arab without a name."

She lifted her cup and tried to see him as she gave a long tense stare. As if drinking a toast to him, she said in a low voice:

"Thanks for all that you've done for me, Englishman!"



Drawn by John Fulton

*Through the gate came the Mexican—and that thing he had in his hand wasn't a cigarette.
... The fugitive spun around and headed back our way, and he too had a gun in his hand.*

The HILL of the TERRIFIED MONK

A complete book-length novel.

by Geoffrey Homes

who wrote "The Street of the Crying Woman"



SHOULD you think the Empire Theater was a flea-trap, you should have seen what George Popol had to put up with for an office. You went up a flight of tired stairs, through an open door into an anteroom featuring a dreary girl with a well-whipped look whose sad eyes tipped you off to the sort of man Popol was. You said you wanted to see Mr. Popol and the name seemed to make her bilious.

"In there," she said and jerked her thumb toward the east.

You followed the flight of the thumb. You opened a door that said POPOL ENTERPRISES, *Private*, and there was Popol in an office with almost as much charm as the waiting-room of a small-town railway station. It even had a wood stove in the corner.

"Mr. Popol," I said.

"What about it?" said Popol in about as unpleasant a tone as one man can use to another without getting heaved through a second-story window. He was a scrawny, drab little man and I'll bet he crawled into that Palm Beach suit. His hair wasn't cut, it was gnawed.

"My name's Logan," I said. "Benjamin Harrison Logan."

"Is it?" His voice needed oiling. He didn't like my looks, I could see that. But he probably didn't like anybody's looks and maybe not his own. For that, you could not blame him—he was a horrible specimen even for the manager of the Empire Theater in Langton.

"Yes sir," I said. "Mr. Fenchester sent me down to help you."

"Nobody could help me," he snapped. "You seen it?" "Not yet, Mr. Popol."

He might at least have asked me to sit. After all, we both worked for the same outfit and could I help it if you couldn't use our pictures to poison rats with? I leaned on the desk and gave him dirty look for dirty look and a fat lot of good it did. He yanked the drawer open. There was a cigar box in the drawer and on top of it was a .38-caliber Colt with a short nose. Popol slid the gun off the box, lifted the lid and took out a twisted hunk of tobacco that in the dark wouldn't pass for a cigar. The drawer banged shut, he shoved the insult to the cigar maker's art in his thin mouth and jumped up.

"Come on," he said, and headed for the door.

The telephone on his desk urged him to return but he paid it no mind. Nor was he impressed when his poor cowering girl said a Mr. Godfrey Larch was on the phone.

"I'll call him back," snapped Popol.

The girl's flat voice followed us into the hall. "He's at the Prentiss home. He wants you to call—"

We didn't hear the rest of it. We were down the stairs and out in the fiery furnace that is Langton in August unless it's raining. We went around to Broadway and along it to the theater and Popol banged on the door until it was jerked open.

An old, old man stared at us unblinkingly. He was a neat little man, with a wisp of a white mustache and hair so white it was almost transparent.

"Where's Peter, Papa?" growled Popol.

"Cleaning out the restrooms," said the little man and his voice was the husk of a voice.

"This is Mr. Logan, Papa," said Popol, and I didn't like the way he said "Logan." "From the Salt Lake office to tell us how to sell it. All the way from Salt Lake comes Mr. Logan and what? He hasn't seen it. We will show it to him."

Papa grunted and his big black eyes were full of bitterness. He turned suddenly and scurried up the balcony stairs and we went into the theater and sat down. The air-conditioning wasn't on, but the lights were and I got my first look at Far Western Theater's Langton palace of the cinema, one of the gems of Far Western's mighty chain. It was very depressing, dirty and garish and more than down at the heels, the sort of house you would expect to find in a big city with a cheap burlesque outfit holding forth in it. I wondered why Mr. Fenchester bothered to reopen it.

Mr. Popol let out a couple of savage yells. Above us a gruff voice suggested that he keep his shirt on, so he subsided into glum silence, puffing at his excuse for a cigar, and I sat beside him and tried not to think about the theater or the job or Mr. Popol or Mr. Fenchester or my own damned foolishness. Presently the lights went out and the screen lit up and a trumpet blew. Then I saw "The Invisible Zombie" and almost sympathized with Popol, almost forgot to be ashamed of myself. Even for one of our theaters, which specialized in horror films, it was horrible.

After a while I shut my eyes and then I only had to listen to it, and that was bad enough. I wondered what

the boys at Hammer Field were doing. Most of them would be gone by now, to Africa or Alaska or Australia or Hawaii and those who were left would soon be gone. I wondered if the girls who used to come out in their station-wagon at night with coffee and sandwiches were the same pretty ones. I wondered how a man could go about making the right people think he wasn't the idiot he seemed.

Popol nudged me, so I opened my eyes. The screen was dark and the lights were on again.

"That's what he gives us to open the Empire with," said Popol.

No use telling him what I thought of it. I wasn't paid to do that. I said, "It will be all right."

MY tact was wasted. "Exploitation expert!" he hissed. That was my title on Far Western's payroll to which I had been attached exactly six weeks. This was my first swing around the circuit. "All right, big shot. Give out with ideas. I suppose you'll be having a parade of invisible zombies."

"We'll manage." I tried to sound hopeful.

"Saturday," said Popol ominously. "We reopen Saturday. This is Monday. Come on. Ideas." He snapped his fingers. "Anyway, the lobby. Right now. What do we do with the lobby?"

There were several things one could do with the Empire lobby. Or Popol could. But I suggested only one. "Get a coffin, Mr. Popol. The finest one in town."

"Maybe I've heard that before."

I didn't doubt it, but I ignored him. "A coffin with a body in it. A beautiful body. A woman's body—wax, of course. And over it hang a vampire."

Popol knew what a vampire was which was understandable considering the pictures he had been running. "A coffin and a vampire. Go on."

I stood up. "Take the lobby. Over there the coffin and hovering over it the vampire. Over here—"

"The door to the women's restroom," said Popol. "You can't put nothing over here."

What was the use? "Don't worry any more about the lobby, Mr. Popol." I tried not to sound tired of it all. "There's nothing to worry about," I added as we emerged into the comparative freshness of the lobby.

"Nothing but the rats and the lawsuit," he said bitterly. "Because of a ferret we are being sued for five hundred dollars." He seemed on the point of hysteria. "Rats. A theater full of rats. So I hire a man with a ferret to kill the rats. And the rats kill the ferret."

I had had enough for the moment. I shook his limp hand. "See you later. You'll have the coffin sent over."

Behind us, someone cleared his throat. I swung around and found a lean, stooped individual standing in the door of the women's lounge, leaning on a broom. He had an ascetic face and very large brown eyes and a look of whimsy around the mouth.

"Sure," said Popol. His eyes punched holes in the lean figure supported by the broom but when he addressed the fellow his voice was surprisingly mild. "Hello, Peter."

"Good afternoon," said Peter.

"A bronze one with silver handles," I suggested. "Borrow it; then you won't need a priority."

"Maybe we should buy it," said Popol. "For the picture."

With that he left me and headed toward his office.

I grinned at Peter and Peter grinned back. I wished Peter was the manager of the Empire because Peter looked like a guy who would take invisible zombies in his stride. "Quite a character."

"Heart of gold," said Peter. "My name's Hale. I'm the janitor." He looked foreign—Spanish or French or Mexican—but he spoke with no trace of an accent.

I gave him my name, we bowed and off I went.

My next port of call was the office of the *Daily Frontier*, a routine chore, one of the many that made me regret a certain lapse of judgment. First the advertising department. Half a page and here's the copy and where's the city room and would you mind calling the desk and suggesting a small news story, say half a column or so? The girl who took the ad picked up the phone, said things into it, waved toward a stairway. Up I went into a big, cool room and faced a cold-eyed citizen named Saunders who dusted me off into the lap of a child of twenty just out of the University of Arizona.

The child's name was Eric Prentiss. He had blue eyes and long lashes and a complexion any woman would have peddled her soul for. He was six foot seven.

Prentiss led me to his desk in the corner. "All right, give me the dope," he said and every word seemed to hurt him.

I gave it to him. He made marks on a piece of copy paper and his boredom increased by the minute. Empire Theater. Reopens Saturday. Everything new but the manager Mr. Popol.

Eric asked without looking up: "You mean you put in sound?"

"And swept the place out."

"Why do you bother? No one will notice. What is an invisible zombie? A Popol you can't see?"

I stood up. "I'm at the Santa Cruz hotel. I'll be in the bar from five to seven for high tea. Stop by."

He thought it over and his blue eyes took me full in. I noticed for the first time that those eyes were troubled. "Maybe I will. I need a drink."

"Women?"

"Men," said Eric. "In recruiting offices. You know what those guys said about me? Too tall for the Army. Too tall for the Navy. Too tall for the Marines. What do they want, midgets?"

I couldn't answer that. But I knew how he felt. The armed forces didn't want me either. I wasn't too tall and I wasn't too short and I wasn't too young or too old. My trouble was, I was a careless fool who had thought he could get away with taking a plane up without permission, a plane that got tired and refused to climb over a eucalyptus tree near the Hammer airport in Fresno. So here I was with a bum knee and a paper saying the Army didn't want me any more. Well, you couldn't blame the Army.

"Around six," I said.

"If I come, I'll be early," he said, pumping my hand with more than necessary vigor. "I've got to be at the airport at six-thirty. I think something's going to happen at the airport and I don't want to miss it."

WE had one mint julep, courtesy of the Santa Cruz management—a lovely creation, four ounces of bourbon with a mint bed planted in it.

"Only time for one," said Eric.

I must have looked downcast. Or Eric was a discerning fellow. "Why don't you come along?" he suggested. "Afterward we'll go to my house for dinner."

I hesitated.

"I was going to ask you to dinner here," I said.

"Plenty at the house," said Eric. "Mother won't mind. Mother loves company. Like to swim?"

I said I did. I said I hated to put him out but I was careful not to say it twice. We finished the drink and out we went into a torrent. Lightning was ripping the clouds to pieces, letting the stored-up water spill down on Langton. It was a beautiful rain and it made the blonde at the cigar counter perk up like a peony even though she wasn't out in it. We made a dash for Eric's car, parked in a no-parking zone. The car was enough to set a man back on his heels, a Chrysler station-wagon with the Russian crown jewels on the instrument panel and six-ply white-walled tires.

We went east, fording creeks that were ordinarily paved streets. Over toward the hills it was as black as Sylvan Fenchester's heart.

"Nice day for flying," I said.

Eric gave the landscape the benefit of his weather eye. "Over in a few minutes."

He was right about the rain. It stopped all of a sudden. Somebody turned off the spigot and over yonder was the sun. The storm was still doing all right down toward Nogales though, the thunder mumbling and grumbling like a New York critic. I didn't mind the heat now. I didn't mind my job so much and I was almost ready to get hopeful about the future.

HALF of Langton was at the airport, cars parked bumper to bumper along the highway and in the parking lot off to the right. We drove into a space reserved for officials and cops, got out and started across the road and just then a car dawdled by, its driver looking for a spot, paying no attention to pedestrians. I wasn't sure, but the driver looked like George Popol.

As we entered the building, someone spoke to Eric in a very small and very soft voice that could have come from a child. It didn't. Aside from the help, there was only one other person in the room—a little Mexican in a white sharkskin suit with a panama hat. Sixteen generations of panama-hat weavers had spent their lives under water making that hat. It was magnificent. Under it was a brown face and a couple of eyes as bright as Pennsylvania glow-worms. The eyes were set above high cheekbones. The little Mexican was sitting very primly on a bench near the door, smoking a cigarette.

"Hello, Mr. Madero," Eric halted beside him, returned his smile.

"I shall see you presently," said the little man.

"You're coming?"

"Oh, yes."

Eric took a couple of steps forward, stopped, swung around, and his face wore a faintly puzzled look. The hat wearer anticipated his question.

"Just waiting," said the little man.

"I thought—"

"Nothing important," said the little man, and his tone suggested that we move on.

We did. We went out to the gate and through the gate where the guard had a pleasant nod for my lengthy companion.

Two other men were waiting by the mail-truck, big lean fellows, casually dressed, with good weatherbeaten faces. Eric's eyes brightened. "Something sure is up," he said, and there was excitement in his low voice.

I glanced around. Over yonder some boys were refueling a bomber and down the line some more were wheeling a transport out of a hangar. Dusk was trying to decide whether to settle on the field or not, and off to the south, the sound of motors said a plane was coming in.

"The law," said Eric, nodding toward the two bulky gentlemen.

They didn't look like cops to me. I said so.

"Feds," said Eric.

A plane roared over the field. I glanced skyward. "Some evil character aboard?"

"I think so. Not sure. That's why I'm here."

"Ask them."

"Clams. No use. I'm not supposed to know they're G-men. Ran into them yesterday in the Federal building and one of the girls tipped me off. They're from out of town." He tossed a look back at the building, frowned. "I wonder."

I let him wonder all he wanted to. The plane was coming in and the boy at the controls knew his business. He put it down like a mother taking a baby carriage off a curb. I thought of all that good Army property I had

put in the scrap heap and then I wasn't so happy about being in Langton, even though it had stopped being so hot. The ship rolled right up in front of us and stopped. A guy shoved the steps against it and opened the door and then our two friends quit talking and moved over behind the mail-truck, their hands in their pockets.

I punched Eric in the back. "Yonder is a bit of cover."

"What for?"

"You and me. See where their hands are? Or do they think it's cold?"

The kid grinned excitedly and edged forward and there wasn't much I could do but tag along. Out of the ship stepped a pretty girl and then another and then a man with a profile and shoulders and biceps who couldn't have been anything but an actor. Our side was being more unobtrusive than ever, playing hide and seek with the passengers. Another dame carrying an amiable dog under her arm. A couple of generals. A guy with a bland, satisfied look who probably wrote slogans for a living. Two more generals; a couple of privates; and finally an undersized fellow, a guy with a brief-case in each hand, who would have looked good riding Whirlaway. Without appearing to, he was taking us all in.

I saw he had spotted the hide-and-seek players but that didn't hurry him; he put the brief-cases down, rummaged in his pockets until he found cigarettes and as though he had all the time in the world he lit one. Then he picked up his luggage and sauntered toward the gate.

"Guess I was wrong," said Eric sadly. He was watching the boys by the mail-truck.

I didn't get a chance to tell him he wasn't wrong. At that moment the jockey came to a sudden stop. He was staring into the building and the only thing interesting in there was the little Mexican under the big hat. The jockey's brief-cases dropped out of his hands. For a moment he stood there, looking into the building and then he turned and with incredible speed made as pretty an end run as you could ask for, digging at the pocket of his jacket as he ran, nor'nor'west, into the teeth of the warm wind and the two big guys trying to head him off. It looked as if they were going to make it.

I CAST one eye at the cover and another toward the building. Through the gate came the Mexican—and that thing he had in his hand wasn't a cigarette.

The fugitive skidded to a halt because our side was between him and the fence and he was about to be thrown for a huge loss. He spun around and headed back our way and he too had a gun in his hand.

Six foot seven inches of youthful enthusiasm slammed into me and I landed on my back in the gravel with Eric on top of me just as the man started shooting. He took three quick shots, then darted to the left which was a mistake because he had runways to cross, several of them, and these days what with the air force the Langton airport is plenty busy. A bomber was roaring down; I let out a yell—but what was the use? I looked the other way.

I think he screamed. It was hard to tell because the four motors of the big plane were thundering and all around me people were yelling. Eric said softly: "Oh, God."

I swallowed a few times, went through the gate and through the airport building and over to the car. I leaned on the car and after a while I didn't feel sick any more so I got in and lit a cigarette. Maybe the guy wanted to die. Maybe dying was better than what the Federal men had to offer. I wondered who the man was and what they wanted him for and why he had been so startled at the sight of the Mexican named Madero.

Presently Eric came around the car.

"All set," he said casually. His face was white and he looked ill but he was trying his best to be the nonchalant reporter, the boy who never turned a hair at anything.

"What's it all about?" My voice was none too steady.

"Damned if I know." He started the motor, put the car in gear. "They wouldn't tell me anything. I called the office and right in the middle of it the city desk said never mind."

He swung the car out into the road and asked himself a question: "Now what was he doing there?"

"Who?"

"José Manuel Madero."

"I wouldn't know," I said. "Aren't you going to take me home?"

I was ignored. "Maybe my aunt will know," he said. "I'll get her to ask him."

Perhaps he wanted me to be curious. I obliged. I asked: "Who is José Manuel Madero?"

"A sort of relative."

"But what does he do for a living?"

"He's a detective," Eric said. "From Mexico City." And he let it go at that.

CHAPTER TWO



USK had slipped up on us but you could still see the hills pasted against the sky with a few stars scattered above them. We drove north a couple of miles, then swung away from town. Back of us a siren screamed faintly. They were coming after the body, probably. It wasn't a nice thought.

I was curious now and the shock of sudden death was wearing off, but I was still dubious about barging in on the Prentiss family. "I hope this is all right?"

"Oh, sure." Eric had to crouch a little to see through the windshield and you understood why the tank corps didn't want him. "Anyway, this is sort of a party." His voice had changed, had become suddenly bitter.

"You better not drag me in, then. People don't want strangers."

"I do." He turned his face toward me. "You're not a stranger. I've grown fond of you in the past hour."

"Facing death together."

"Fearlessly," said Eric.

"Well, almost. Lots of people at this party?"

"The best." He wasn't too young to be ironic. "The very best. Godfrey Larch, the guy who wants to marry Mother. I'm afraid he's going to make it."

Popol was supposed to call a man named Godfrey Larch. He was supposed to call him at the Prentiss home. I did some more wondering, then decided to say no more about going back to the hotel.

"I think that's the reason for the party," Eric went on. "I think she's going to tell the world about it tonight." He sighed. "But there'll be some nice people there. Don't worry. The man Mother should marry will be there. And José Manuel Madero will be there."

"Him again," I said.

"Him," said Eric. "Big hat and all. I told you he was a relative."

"But a cop."

"A sort of relative, that is. My aunt—Mother's sister—is married to his wife's cousin. What does that make us? Second cousins. Third cousins. Oh, it's too damned complicated. Madero's cousin—or rather his wife's cousin—and my uncle own the Grand Theater."

"How does it feel to have a cop for kinfolks?"

"He's a nice little guy."

"But still a cop."

"Don't you like cops?"

"No."

"Maybe he won't come after what happened back there," Eric said. I repressed a shudder. With a party in prospect, I preferred to forget what had happened back there.

"I'm going to get very drunk and punch Godfrey in the nose," said Eric, slowing for a curve. By his tone I gathered he meant it. "He's English," he continued bitterly. "But that isn't why I loathe him. I like the British. He's one of those. You know. Been away for years, but you can slice his accent. Family sent him out here to cure his sinus trouble, he says. But don't believe it. The family was smart. He doesn't want Mother. He wants her dough." Talking about it, even to a comparative stranger, seemed to do him good.

"Mind you, I don't blame him. Not for the money part. Mother has much too much money. It's just that he's a louse. And he hates my guts."

"You're doing all right."

"I think I shade him. Well, I have reasons. Not only because of Mother but because of Hilary Innes. Everything was fine. Everything was swell. Mother would have married Hilary. And then this jerk had to come along."

He put his foot on the brake, shoved his hand out and we swung into a graveled lane. By the looks of things, Mrs. Prentiss did have money, plenty of it. You could call the place we were headed for a house if you wanted to be conservative. It stood in a park in the middle of the desert where trees had no business growing, a hunk of concrete and plaster and glass almost as big as the Mormon temple in St. George but better looking. And around back was a swimming-pool that where I came from would have been called a lake. A party was in progress at the pool.

"You can't blame Godfrey," I said as we came through the gate and headed for the miniature inland sea. Yonder in the corner of the wall was an outdoor fireplace and a distinguished-looking family retainer was riding herd on a bunch of longhorn steaks, putting the Prentiss brand on them before he drove them out on the coals. The air was heavy with the sharp scent of burning charcoal. The servant swung around, fork in hand, and I saw that he had his collar on backside to. I looked at Eric. I looked back at the servant.

"That," said Eric, "is Hilary Innes."

"He looks like a preacher."

"He should. He's the rector of St. James. And a handy man to have around a barbecue-pit. He even makes the sauce."

"That why you want him for a stepdaddy?"

"That and other reasons," Eric said, waving to the fork wielder. The rector waved back and grinned.

I began meeting people. My hand was shaken. A girl with copper-colored hair and a boy's slim figure was in front of us, a girl with great brown eyes. One look at Eric and a light went on in those eyes.

"This is Sally," Eric said and with that he picked her up and tossed her in the pool. If I hadn't seen her eyes I would have figured her for a sister. "Sally Crossland," said Eric.

She came up sputtering, said something uncomplimentary and swam away.

"Nice to have known her," I said.

Eric ignored the remark, reached out and tagged another female who had been melted down and poured into a gold bathing-suit. He had a right to be familiar. "This is Mother. . . . Mother, Ben Logan," he said proudly.

And he should be proud. Whistler would have sent Mother packing if she had come around looking for a modeling job. But not Petty. Mother had Eric's golden curls and Eric's blue eyes and the same fine face, but not the figure. She had no right looking so young.

Sally wasn't the only woman around who got stars in her eyes when she looked at Eric. Mrs. Prentiss smiled up at him and then she smiled at me and I didn't blame Eric for hating Godfrey. Her voice was as sweet as her smile. All she said was, "So glad you could come," but she did things to the words.

"So am I," I said.

A deep voice boomed near us: "Oh, there you are, Kelly." And a fine figure of a man joined our little group, a six-foot chunk of tanned flesh and gray hair. He put his hand possessively on Mrs. Prentiss' arm and she took her smile away from us and gave it to him.

"This is Godfrey Larch," said Mrs. Prentiss.

Maybe Eric had prejudiced me but I took an instant dislike to Godfrey. Eric had said he thought they would be married. I didn't think. I knew. I knew from the way she looked at him. My hand was squeezed by a cider press and the voice boomed again: "Glad to meet you, old chap."

British to the core, that guy. And maybe I was wrong but he seemed about as genuine as the oil stock Father used to buy. From a corner of my eye I saw Hilary Innes heading for us and then I was being introduced again and getting another good firm handshake. Only the parson was a trifle more respectful of my bones. He shot a glance at Godfrey that had hex written all over it but his rival didn't give ground.

"Evenin', *padre*," Godfrey said.

Innes nodded curtly. He asked Mrs. Prentiss when he should put the steaks on, got his answer and went away. You could see he didn't like to stand around and watch Godfrey being possessive. "Good faithful old Hilary," drawled Godfrey, and pulled Mrs. Prentiss closer to him. You could almost hear Eric grinding his teeth.

"Journalist too?" Godfrey wasn't at all interested in what I was but he seemed to like the sound of his voice.

I shook my head. "I work for a theater outfit. The one that owns the Empire," I said. "I'm down here to tell George Popol what to do."

"Really?" Maybe he was interested and maybe he wasn't. I didn't get a chance to go into the matter further. Eric grabbed my arm and jerked me toward the dressing-room.

"See what I mean?" He hurled a pair of trunks at me, started tearing his clothes off. "I'll fix him one of these days. I'll cut him up in little pieces."

"And let Hilary barbecue him," I suggested.

Eric stood on one leg, looking at me thoughtfully. "What gets into women, Ben?"

I slid into the trunks and shrugged. "I've never been able to figure them out."

"Hilary's such a nice guy. Droll and kind. Makes a couple of thousand a year and gives half of it away. And he adores Mother. So she goes for that drip-head over heels. It's disgusting." Angrily he pulled on his trunks. "They aren't married yet."

"Thank God," said Eric. "Let's swim and forget him."

I swam under water the length of the pool, came up to find a nymph in a red bathing-suit.

"Hello, stranger," the nymph said.

I pulled myself up beside her.

I was moderately dark there on the edge of the pool but I could see her well enough to know that she was more than ordinarily attractive, a good healthy specimen with full and tempting lips. "Ben Logan," I told her. "Now I'm not a strange man—so you can talk to me."

"I like strange men," the nymph said.

"I like strange women," I said. "But I don't like them to stay strange."

"Tony Braymer." The moon was edging itself over a ragged hill, then it spun free. We sat a couple of feet apart and watched it rise. "You should see it down where I live," Tony said softly. "It's so much bigger and brighter."

By down, I discovered, she meant just north of Nogales near the border. She had a ranch there on a creek and there were cottonwoods along the creek and no neighbors for miles. It was very peaceful and she left it only when she had to. Lonely? Of course not. Friends came down

week-ends and there was a couple who took care of her and the boys who took care of the white-faced cattle.

"No Mr. Braymer?"

"Not any more," said Tony.

"Why?"

She shrugged. "No Mrs. Logan?"

"No."

"I could ask you why, but I won't."

"And I could tell you I haven't met her yet, but I won't."

Behind her was a handbag and she pulled it to her and brought out cigarettes and matches. I struck a match on the tiles, held the flame out and for a moment I saw her face clearly. She was very beautiful and she had a ranch with white-faced cattle on it and there was no Mr. Braymer. Men must be at a premium in Langton.

ACROSS the pool Godfrey Larch was sitting at the feet of Mrs. Prentiss and his drawling voice and heavy laugh drifted over. The parson was still puttering around the barbecue-pit, fussing with the fire. Eric was sitting very close to a girl not half as pretty as Sally.

"A fine party," Tony said. "Kelly always gives fine parties."

"Friend or relative?"

"Friend," she said and rose.

"Leaving?"

"For a little while."

"I'd offer to take you home but I haven't a car," I said.

"Maybe I'll take you home." She smiled and went away. I watched her cross the lawn toward the house and a moment later I saw Godfrey get up and start after her. But I didn't have time to wonder if it was a coincidence or not because a mermaid came up from the green depths at my feet and hooked her elbows on the edge. It was Sally.

"I thought Eric drowned you," I said.

"You were in no condition to think." She swung up beside me and we dangled our feet in the water.

"That?" I motioned toward the house. Tony was just going in and Godfrey wasn't far behind.

"That," said Sally.

"I had to talk to someone."

"You can talk to me."

"With Eric around?"

"He never pays any attention to me. He knows me too well. Lived next door. Grammar school. High school. Two years of college. Then I had to go to work. Isn't he a nice boy?"

A pleasant woman interrupted us at this point by putting drinks in our hands. She was Kelly's sister, I discovered when Sally introduced us. Mrs. Juan Aruba, wife of the owner of the Grand, and if her husband's cousin's husband was coming to this party he'd better hurry because the steaks were on the fire. You could hear them sizzling now, and I could hear the Reverend Innes whistling. Not a hymn. He was whistling "Jingle Jangle Jingle." Mrs. Aruba went away. I saw that Sally was keeping her eye on Eric and on the youth's companion.

"She's just after his money," I said. "The little fortune hunter."

Abruptly, Sally changed the subject. "What do you do for a living? Or do you?"

I told her and she wasn't impressed. Her glance said I looked able-bodied and healthy. Her soft voice said: "I have two brothers in the Army."

"That's fine." What else was there to say? Under the circumstances it was a little hard to convince her that I had tried to be patriotic.

Then Tony spared me further embarrassment by coming back. She dropped down beside me and purred at Sally and Sally purred back. They scratched each other's eyes out from a distance.

"You've met?" asked Tony.

"Old friends," I said. "I thought I'd lost you."

"Not Tony," Sally said and slid into the water. "When you have time, tell me some more about putting coffins in lobbies." She put her feet against the tile, kicked and floated away.

"What does she mean, coffins?" asked Tony.

"My job," I said.

"How very odd," a voice above us murmured. "How very, very odd." I looked up and there was Mr. Madero, hat in hand, beaming down at us. He put his hand in his pocket, brought out a cigarette-case, opened it and with a flick of his thumb flipped a cigarette up between his lips. Then he bowed and went away.

HILARY INNES proved a good cook; the steaks were magnificent, and there was no balancing your plate on your knees. Good solid tables, sharp knives, potatoes with their insides scrambled up with chives, asparagus and hollandaise.

José Manuel was on my left and Sally was on my right, but she wasn't having much of me, so I talked to José Manuel about Mexico.

Had I lived there? Not lived, exactly. A few years back I had been there for three months shepherding a troupe of dancing-girls from Mexico City to Puebla to Vera Cruz to Guadalajara. There had been little time to look around.

Did I know Oaxaca? Madero came from Oaxaca. His name was not really Madero. He was an Indian, and his father had been a muleteer, and his grandfather had been a muleteer. He didn't tell me his real name because he said I couldn't pronounce it anyway. In the middle of the meal he showed me the cigarette trick again.

"Who was the man at the airport?" I asked in my most casual tone.

He shot a sharp glance my way. "No one important."

"You seemed to frighten him." (An old Logan failing, poaching on forbidden preserves, shooting ducks out of season, asking for trouble.) "What had he done? Robbed the national bank?"

"You're very curious, Mr. Logan."

"I beg your pardon," I said. "But police methods have always interested me."

"You've had experience with the police?"

"Not in Mexico. Now down there how do you work?"

"We try to be scientific."

"You solve murders?"

"When the need arises."

"But mostly you do Government work?"

"Were you ever in Cholula?"

If he wanted to change the subject there wasn't much I could do but let him tell me about the old murals in the pyramid at Cholula. From that he skipped to legends. Had I ever heard the one about the woman who was shod?

"Shot or shod?"

"Shod," he said. "With mule-shoes." He told me about it, a grim tale. And did I know the legend of the Terri-fied Monk?

I shook my head.

He gave me a faint smile. "Some day I'll tell you. Some day when I have more time."

It must have been a very long story because he had time enough to tell me how he had once been a coffin-maker and how he had two little daughters who were Roy Rodgers' Rangers and a wife who listened to Bing Crosby recordings by the hour and a brother who rented boats to tourists at Xochimilco. And had I ever tasted pulque? He was describing the best pulque technique when we were forcibly reminded there were others present.

Eric was at Godfrey's table. All of a sudden he pitched a hard roll at his future stepdaddy and hit him smack between the eyes. It was a beautiful shot.

Godfrey's chair went over with him in it. Then both men were on their feet, heading for each other. A good-looking Mexican made a grab for Godfrey and detained him momentarily. Godfrey's comment about that was shocking. The Mexican replied in Spanish and from the way Madero gulped I judged Godfrey had been properly told off. Eric took advantage of the diversion by tagging Godfrey with a looping right that sent him rolling. Godfrey still had fight in him. He came back for more and when the Mexican got in the way again, heaved him in the pool. Then he took Eric on. That boy had a lot to learn about fighting. He was wide open, but only for a moment. After that he was stretched out on the grass, all six foot seven of him.

Eric sat up and shook his head, then stood up shakily and you could see he was digging way down for suitable phrases to heave at the older man.

"Eric!" cried Kelly Prentiss. "Go into the house!"

He turned, stared at her for a moment, then ran out of the garden. A car roared. It tore away into the night. No one spoke for a bit. All you could hear was the car going away and the Mexican as he sloshed around at the edge of the pool. The Mexican wasn't saying anything but Godfrey should have been glad the steak-knife was out of reach. Godfrey went over and gave him a hand. They came back to the table.

"Sorry, Aruba," Godfrey said. "So sorry, old man. I lost my temper."

The Mexican gave him a short bow, then headed off in the direction of the house. I gathered that he was the theater-owner, because he went right in as though he owned the joint.

"You'll all forgive me, I hope," said Godfrey.

He sat down and picked up his knife. Most of us followed suit. I gave the ex-coffinmaker the once over. He was calmly doing his cigarette trick, that brown face of his as expressionless as the blonde at the end of the line in a burlesque house. He lit a cigarette, looked at me through the smoke and picked up the pulque matter where he had dropped it.

"You turn the pigskin inside out," he explained. "But never remove the hair. That's what gives the beverage its distinctive flavor."

AT eleven the Reverend Innes had driven me home from the Prentiss hostel. It wasn't my idea. Tony ran out on me. Sally ran out on me, and Kelly didn't ask me to stick around. And the youth I came with was off somewhere drowning his anger. So I rode into town in the Reverend's 1929 Ford. It turned out fine.

We stopped at a little all-night café and talked. A couple of times I offered him, very delicately, the subject of Godfrey Larch, but he shied away from it and insisted on hearing about me. He thought the job I was doing must be fun. On our way to the hotel we went by the Empire because he wanted to see how the lobby display was coming along.

Popol must have gone to a cut-rate mortuary for the coffin. It was new but it wasn't anything spectacular. It was on sawhorses with the lid propped up and Popol had tilted it a trifle so you could see the dummy inside. The vampire looked a lot like a badly stuffed turkey buzzard. Popol had added a few old skeletons for good measure.

"Isn't it a little grim?" Hilary asked.

"You should see the picture."

"Perhaps I will."

"I'll make you a guest of honor," I said. "Then you can preach a sermon on the invisible zombies in the human soul."

"God forbid!" said Hilary.

I sent him on his way then because it was only a block or so to the hotel and I felt like walking. When I turned the corner I bumped into Eric. He was sober enough but

not very friendly. Gave me a gruff hello and crossed the street. I didn't mind. The poor kid was having a rough time of it. I needed a nightcap, so I went through the Santa Cruz lobby to the bar and had something made mostly of rum, very tasty and cold. I was going to have another until I saw Godfrey over in a dark corner with George Popol. Neither one looked happy. They sat there hunched over the table talking in low voices, and their faces were set and stern. So I went upstairs.

CHAPTER THREE



HE chief of police was named Angus McCardle and he didn't even bat an eye when I suggested he make Sylvan Fenchester an honorary detective lieutenant. He gave me a badge and I gave him eight fine seats for the Western première. Then he called the mayor's office and told them I was coming over.

The mayor, the Honorable J. Cheever Paxton, was more than willing to ride in the parade. The city council renamed a street for Mr. Fenchester. How was he to know it was a little dirt affair two blocks long, and that every time a movie outfit made a picture or opened a theater in this neck of the woods it got its name changed?

By ten o'clock that Tuesday morning I had done what would pass for a day's work. Anyway, the sun was getting down to business, so I dropped in at the De Lanza bar. Then I went through the lobby toward the street and ran smack into José Manuel. I shook hands, and wondered how I could fit him into Saturday night's goings-on. Maybe he would do his cigarette trick. Maybe he would make a batch of pulque.

"I see you have been active," said Madero. "I came past the theater."

"Only the beginning. How about a beer?"

"No, thank you. I have some purchases to make—in Porters. Have you been to Porters? It's a wonderful store. Such beautiful cowboy hats."

I followed Madero around Porters for an hour while he bought out the joint. Up one aisle and down the other we went, getting all the attention in the world from the help. Everyone seemed to think he was wonderful. Everyone seemed to know a whole lot more about him than I did. No two ways about it, Madero was good guest-of-honor material at any man's première.

I started to speak and the blast of a siren cut me off.

Madero glanced streetward and so did I. A police car flashed by.

Again I started to broach the subject. Again my voice was drowned out by a siren.

Just then a chunky, sullen man in a baggy suit barged into Porters and flat-footed it over to Madero. He had cop written all over him so I pricked up my ears and forgot the première.

"I've been looking all over hell for you, Mr. Madero," the man said. "McCardle wants you right away. There's been a murder."

Very carefully José Manuel put down the broad six-gun belt he had been examining and gave his attention to the speaker. "Murder, Mr. Oswald?"

"In the Empire Theater," Oswald said.

"Who?" asked José Manuel.

He should have asked me. I knew. But why in the Empire of all places? Godfrey Larch had no business being in the Empire.

Oswald's answer gave me pause. "That little Greek," Oswald said. "George Popol. The guy who manages the joint. Someone shot him. And it looks like Godfrey Larch might be mixed up in it. Anyway, he's missing."

Nobody said I couldn't, so I tagged along. There was a big crowd in front of the theater. The iron fence kept

the crowd out of the lobby and I was grateful for that. I didn't want anything to happen to the borrowed coffin or the borrowed buzzard that was subbing for a vampire. Someone had dropped the lid of the coffin so you couldn't see the wax figure inside and it wasn't quite as gruesome as it might have been, though the skeletons did add a macabre touch. Oswald got us through the crowd and through the fence and past the coffin into the foyer.

George Popol lay on the worn carpet at the foot of the stairs leading up to the balcony and half the Langton police force was standing around being puzzled.

On the floor beside Popol's body was a gun and it looked like the one I had seen in his desk yesterday, though I couldn't be sure. It seemed to me that he hadn't been expecting death—or if he was, why was he lugging a department-store dummy around when the bullet hit him? The dummy lay to the left of the body and it too, had suffered. Somehow it had been decapitated and the head was over yonder. Eric Prentiss was also over yonder, looking very grim.

A plain-clothes man wanted to know who the hell I thought I was, so I told him. The wisp of a coroner was squatting by Popol's remains smoking a homemade cigarette. He nodded to Madero.

"About three, near as I can figure out," the coroner said. "Looks like he was coming downstairs when he got it. That's what it looks like." But what was Popol coming downstairs carrying a dummy for at three o'clock in the morning, a dummy that should be in yon coffin? That oddity didn't seem to bother the coroner at all.

Madero thrust his hands in his pockets and donned a suitably inscrutable expression.

"Janitor found him, José," the coroner said. "Want to talk to the janitor? McCardle's upstairs with him."

WE headed upstairs. I found myself beside Eric Prentiss, so I asked him what he made of it. But he merely shrugged. "I don't know."

"They're looking for Godfrey Larch," I said. That should have brought a gleam of happiness to his eyes. It didn't. We made the rest of the trip in silence.

The air was hot and dead and heavy with the smell of decay. There was a door marked *Private* with a cop in front of it, and he opened the door and we filed into a hot little box of a room. The architect who designed the Empire apparently didn't have much use for theater managers and it was easy to understand why Popol preferred that office around the corner. There were three men in the room, Chief McCardle, Peter Hale the janitor, and Popol's father. Well, there was someone who was sorry Popol was dead and that was his old man. He was huddled in the corner staring straight ahead and his eyes were terribly sad. Not a peep out of him, not a moan or a tear. Neither Hale nor McCardle seemed to give a damn.

"Buenos días, José," said McCardle and his accent would have made even the teacher of Spanish in the high school in Fargo, South Dakota, flinch. "Postman's holiday, huh?" He saw me. "Glad you came along. Couple of questions we want to ask you."

"Anything I can do to help," I said.

"Take a load off your dogs, then." He turned to Popol, Sr., and his tone softened. "You run along, Spyros. Sorry about this."

Popol made a gesture that indicated the futility of everything and departed.

"Took it hard," observed McCardle. "George wasn't so much but he was Spyros' only boy."

"Pobrecito," said José Manuel.

"There are times when this aint the nicest job in the world," said McCardle. "You sure see the seamy side."

"You sure do," Eric said. He should have kept his mouth shut if he wanted to see how the mills of the gods ground.

"Outsider!" McCardle pointed to the door.

"You mean me?" Eric asked.

"Go on now, Eric. When we got something we'll call you." Eric started to protest. "Don't give me that stuff about a deadline," growled McCardle. "You got until seven tonight. Now beat it." So Eric beat it.

Madero sat down and hoisted his pants at the knees to save the creases. You could have carved a duck with those creases. McCardle prodded me with a question:

"What do you know about this?"

"Not a thing."

"So you don't know a thing." And this was the same man who had made Sylvan a detective lieutenant. That's what murder does to people.

"All right," I said. "I had to get publicity for the theater, some way. Give me a cool cell in the basement."

"You're not funny," said McCardle. "When did you see Popol last?"

"Around one this morning."

"You did? Where?"

"In the Santa Cruz bar."

"Talk to him?"

"No. I dropped in for a drink and saw him. That's all."

He didn't ask me who was with Popol so I didn't tell him. He tried to get me with my guard down. "Why was he killed?"

"Somebody didn't like him."

Madero said gently, "Pardon me, Mr. McCardle. May I ask a question?"

"Sure, José." Mac had had enough of me, anyway. He didn't love me any more.

"Perhaps you can explain something that puzzles me, Mr. Logan." (A new experience—a gentleman with a badge on. But maybe he acted differently in Mexico.) "The dummy," said Madero. "Why?"

I told him—why the dummy and why the coffin and the vampire and the skeletons.

"Thank you," said Madero.

"You're welcome. Now may I go?"

McCardle waved at the door, his face sour. "You at the Santa Cruz? Don't leave town without telling me."

ERIC was waiting for me at the foot of the stairs. Popol wasn't. They had taken him away. The dummy was still there and so were the cops and so were the people outside, a whole slew of them getting well broiled. The boy gave me a nod and I followed him across the foyer.

We went through the curtains into the left aisle; then Eric stopped me by putting his hand on my shoulder. "I've been thinking. You said they were looking for Larch."

"Oswald told Madero that."

"Did he? You know what? I saw Godfrey and Popol together at the Santa Cruz early this morning. What do you think? Should I tell Mac?"

I let him think by my silence that I was giving the matter deep thought. He didn't wait long. He went on: "I don't know quite what to do. You know—Mother. I don't like Godfrey. But—she's—well, it's her life and maybe she does love him."

"McCardle will find out about the Santa Cruz anyway," I pointed out.

Eric sighed. "I guess he will. Then I should keep my mouth shut?"

"That's up to you."

"I think I should try and find Godfrey. Don't you?"

"Sort of—warn him?"

"Well—he's—he's part of the family, almost," Eric said weakly.

"Maybe you should."

"Let's get out of here," he said. I started toward the foyer, but he halted me. "Can't we get out through another way? Isn't there an exit down near the stage?"

"There should be." I groped my way through the darkness. There was a door two-thirds of the way down and it opened into an alley. The sunlight was blinding. I put my hands over my eyes for a moment, heard Eric fumbling with the door, heard it close behind him.

"Why don't you come with me?" Eric asked. Young as he was, the night had left its mark on his face. It was drawn and his eyes were a little bloodshot and he had forgotten to shave.

"Where?"

"Out to Godfrey's."

"If the cops are looking for him, he won't be there."

"They haven't had much time to look."

"I've things to do," I said. They could wait but it didn't do to be eager. Baby was up to something and I was getting interested.

"Mother would want me to do anything I could," Eric went on. "That's the only reason I'm going out there."

"All right. Come on," I said.

We went over to the lot where his car was parked. It was a job keeping up to the boy. The recruiting officer should have taken a walk with him. A stride like that would have been good in any man's army.

"I wonder," Eric wondered as we drove north on Stone. "Madero being here and Popol murdered. Do you think there's a connection?"

"Popol was killed by a disgruntled patron," I said. "Is Madero a big shot? People treat him like one."

"Uncle Juan says he is," replied Eric. "Uncle Juan seems to think he's Comacho's right-hand man. I never took the trouble to find out." He changed the subject. "That guy at the airport, Ben. The paper wouldn't use the story. Just a squib saying he was a business man named Jeff Parks from El Paso and that the whole thing was an accident. Not a word about the FBI being around. And now Popol." Excitement crept into his tone. "There's something there. I'll bet there's something there."

"Popol was a spy," I said. "There's your answer."

"Oh, sure," said Eric. "Here we are."

Godfrey wasn't home. Anyway, he didn't answer the bell.

"Kick the door in," I suggested. "He shot Popol and then his conscience hurt him, so he shot himself."

"This is no time for nonsense," Eric snapped.

I tried the door. Careless fellow, Godfrey—careless, or trusting. It opened and I walked in. "Make yourself at home," I said. Eric hesitated on the steps. He looked around but no one was paying any attention to us and why should they? Two honest men doing their best to help a guy out of a jam.

The place was tidy and clean, no cobwebs, no dust under the couch, no dishes in the sink. Kelly Prentiss' picture was on the dresser in the bedroom. It said, "Godfrey, I adore you." The two bottom drawers were partially open and I took a peek. Practically empty. I looked in the closet. No suitcases. Only a couple of suits and no lightweight ones. "I'd say he has scrambled."

Eric nodded. Eric looked worried and thoughtful.

"Maybe he's with your mother," I suggested.

MY tall companion thought that over, got up presently and barged into the sitting-room where the phone was, and called Kelly. She hadn't heard from Godfrey. . . . What was the matter?

"Nothing, darling," Eric said. "I wanted to talk to him and called his apartment but he wasn't there. Wanted to ask him something, that's all. It doesn't matter." He hung up before Kelly could get more inquisitive, looked at me with his brows pulled down.

"All right, you wonder," I said. "You saw Popol and Godfrey together this morning. Now Popol's dead, and Godfrey is gone. Does that sum it up?"

"Just about."

"You know what I'd do if I were you?" I didn't wait for him to ask what I'd do. I told him. I said I would go back to the paper and sit tight. "Unless you'd like them to find you here," I added.

"What do you mean by that?" He was looking at me sharply and he sounded nervous.

"Nothing."

"Let's go, then." I told Eric to drop me at the Grand Theater. I told him to stop looking so glum and how about getting Sally around six and having dinner with me because Sally was a wonderful girl. He still looked glum. He was less nervous now but not much. When I got out of the car I shook his hand.

"Get a line on Tony," I said. "I'll bet she's the daughter of Mata Hari."

"Full of quips," said Eric and drove away.

CHAPTER FOUR



JUAN ARUBA was in, but Juan was busy. His secretary was the sort of girl wives don't trust—the mean suspicious things!

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"My theater manager got himself shot," I said. "I'm looking for a new one."

She was interested. She had heard a vague report that Mr. Popol was no more, and she wanted to know how and why. All I wanted to know was why. She said she had seen Mr. Popol a couple of times when he dropped in to fight with Mr. Aruba about bookings. An unreasonable man, Popol—thought no one else had the right to run horror pictures. Why, when Mr. Aruba had a Saturday matinee of "The Mad Doctor of Market Street," Mr. Popol was furious! I was going to ask her what Aruba did to get people in to see "The Mad Doctor," but we were interrupted. Mrs. Aruba came out of her husband's office, and if ever a woman looked frightened and upset, she did. Six invisible zombies were on her trail, and she knew it. Not a look at me, not a look at the secretary, not even a suspicious one, and she was gone. Aruba was standing in the doorway, his dark, handsome face troubled, his eyes sad. He saw me, pulled himself together.

"How do you do?" he said. "What can I do for you?" Aruba was remote but pleasant. I saw he remembered me from last night.

I told him who I was and what I did, and that our theater manager was no more.

"I heard about it." He didn't weep. If he was broken-hearted, he didn't show it.

"We'll need a new one quick," I said. "I thought you might know a man."

"Sorry. I can't help you."

"Thanks."

"Odd about Popol, isn't it?"

I nodded. "Madero is working on the case."

"So I heard."

"He's a relative of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Good man?"

I got an odd look with the answer. "Quite."

"I'm still shocked," I said. "Why, only last night—this morning rather—there Popol was sitting talking to Larch in the Santa Cruz bar. Who would have thought this!"

My information seemed to impress him not at all, and his reaction was to stare morosely at the clean tan blotter on his desk. Compared to his cousin's husband, Juan was a trifle colorless. You could look at Juan and figure him out—the good family still loyal to Spain, the church, the hacienda. The sort of people who thought of Mexico still as a Spanish colony, who dropped posies on Cortez' shrine, and said the peon was all right in his place.

"Still going ahead with the reopening?" Aruba asked.

"Have to. Under the circumstances it seems a bit grim. But you know—business."

"Why don't you let Popol's father handle the theater?"

"May have to."

"He's all right. Bright old fellow. And he knows the racket."

"I'll think it over." We shook hands. He tried to look happy but didn't succeed very well. . . .

Popol's sudden death hadn't brought cheer to his secretary's existence. She seemed genuinely broken up about it. I said hello and she burst into tears.

"There, there!" I said and patted her shoulder.

"Oh, Mr. Logan!" This time she really opened the spillway.

"We all have to face it sometime," I pointed out.

"But—but—I hated him so," she sobbed. "All the things I said about him to myself. And now—"

"He's better off," I said. "Think of the living, Miss—"

"Arbuckle." She blew her nose. "Sophie Arbuckle."

"Life must go on, Sophie. Suppose you get Mr. Fenchester for me. In the Salt Lake office."

I smiled tenderly and went into Popol's office. It wasn't empty. Spyros Popol was sitting at his son's desk, going through a bunch of papers, and there was a nice brisk fire burning in the wood stove in the corner. I nodded and tried to make myself comfortable in a chair that had come into Arizona in a covered wagon. What can you say to a man whose son is down in the morgue with a bullet-hole in him?

Spyros grunted and went on pawing through the stack of papers. Sitting there at the desk, he seemed even smaller than he was, a little mummy of a man, one who had been hung up in the sun like a piece of jerky for almost a century. His eyes were the liveliest part of him, black as ripe olives. My presence made not the slightest difference to him. When he got around to it, he went over to the stove, lifted the lid and dropped a handful of junk on the flames.

A man had to say something. I asked: "Would you consider staying on here, Mr. Popol?"

Spyros banged the lid down, tossed the lifter in the wood-box, came back to the desk and sat down. He chewed his mustache, dug at his right ear with his forefinger and decided I was worth noticing. "Sure," he said.

"Of course it's up to Mr. Fenchester," I told him. "I just put a call through to him in Salt Lake."

"Reverse the charges," snapped Spyros. "Did you?"

Just the man to run the Empire. Film salesmen would love him. "No," I said.

He was reaching for the phone when the door opened.

Sylvian Fenchester walked in, glowering. He was almost as dapper as José Manuel, and about as cheerful as a baked halibut. He shut the door and said: "This is a hell of a mess."

He looked like an actor, and at one stage of his career I think he had done a short stretch with a stock company in St. Louis. Playing juveniles, probably.

"I just called you," I said.

"The girl told me."

"You got here fast," I said.

"I'm on my way to Guaymas." He saw a chair near the stove and headed for it. The heat stopped him. "What the hell!"

Could I help it if Mr. Popol was an old man and the cold bothered him? I ignored the fire. I said: "Guaymas? We got a theater there?"

"No. Fishing. I stopped at the hotel to see you, and found out what had happened. What about the shooting? What are the cops doing? They found out who did it yet?"

"They have sort of a hold tag on one guy."

"Who?"

"You wouldn't know him. A guy named Godfrey Larch."

He didn't look at me, so I couldn't tell whether the name meant anything.

"You're going to stick around, of course," I added.

"I see no reason to."

"Then get out of town before the chief of police stops you. He'll want you to stay." I sent a look in Spyros' direction. He was sorting papers, putting them in two piles, one for the stove, one for the files.

"What for?" Fenchester snapped.

"He's a suspicious man."

"Suspicious? Why should he be suspicious?" Fenchester sounded like a querulous old woman, not the self-contained, self-assured head of Far Western. Why should anyone be suspicious, particularly me, yet here I was wondering if Sylvan had really got into town this morning on his way to Guaymas.

"I suppose it's because it happened in the theater."

"Tell me about it."

I told him.

"Dammit," he said, when I was through. "It's a mess. Going to affect business. Can't help it." That was one thing George Popol wasn't worrying about down there in the nice cool vault of the morgue; he wasn't bothered by thoughts of business or heat. "We'll need a good stunt," Sylvan mused. "Something that will hit the papers."

"We're hitting the papers, all right," I said.

His glance would have wounded a thin-skinned man. "Sometimes I wonder if I made a mistake hiring you."

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Fenchester."

He put his hand to his forehead, concentrated hard, found what he was hunting for. "Here's one that should work. The biggest family in Langton. Man and wife with the most kids. Give a prize. Get 'em on the stage."

"Swell," I said.

He thought it was. He rose, went over to the desk and stood looking down at Spyros. The old man paid him no mind at all.

"I thought Mr. Popol might take over," I said.

"We'll see." Fenchester swung around, dusted his pants, rocked his panama down at a more jaunty angle. "I'm going on. Nothing I can do here. If you need me, call me at La Mar Azul in Guaymas."

I waited until he hit the door. "When you leave the building, keep an eye open for a little Mexican," I suggested. "A well-dressed little man. He may be watching the place."

Fenchester stopped. His head came round slowly. "What was that?"

"His name is José Manuel Madero," I said.

The head swung back into place, and I couldn't see his face. "Oh," he said, and left us.

I gave him plenty of time to reach the street, then lit out after him. He was well up the block, walking briskly north when I got outside. I crossed and moved along just as briskly, keeping an eye on him.

At Congress he waited for traffic to thin, then went over. But he didn't go far. The De Lanza hotel was there on the corner, and he disappeared through the revolving doors. Guaymas indeed!

CHAPTER FIVE



UCH a peaceful town, too. Everyone minding his own business, happy and contented. Everyone, that is, but the two gentlemen with cigars stuck in their broad, placid faces, who were occupying the chairs in my room. When I came back to the hotel at one o'clock, there they were. One was McCardle. The other was Jerry Oswald.

I said: "All right. What have I done and how did you get in here?"

"You left the door open." McCardle replied. He took out a pencil and notebook, opened the book and held the pencil poised. "Name?" asked McCardle.

"Benjamin Harrison Logan. Age thirty-four. Birthplace Placerville. Profession—exploitation man."

"How do you spell *exploitation*," Oswald wanted to know.

I told him. He wrote with some difficulty, as though he were just learning.

"Why did you come to Langton?" asked McCardle.

"To reopen the Empire."

"When did you get here?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Did you know Popol?"

"Never saw him before."

"You're sure of that?"

I said I was. I said I had never seen Langton before, either.

My suitcase was on the stand at the foot of the bed, and I wondered if they had found anything of interest in it, because it was open when I went out this morning, and now it was closed. "How well do you know Godfrey Larch?"

"We met last night."

"Why didn't you tell me you saw him with Popol in the bar this morning?"

"You didn't ask me."

"That's right, I didn't. How thoughtless!"

"I didn't realize it was important."

"So you went out to his apartment and looked around."

"So I did."

"Why?" He stopped looking sleepy. He stopped looking pleasant.

"Have you talked to Eric Prentiss?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"That you were going out, so he went along."

I shrugged. "I get curious sometimes."

"So do I. I'm curious right now."

"I wish you would be frank with me," I said. "I didn't kill Popol. I don't know who did, and I don't care much. All I'm doing is trying to make a living."

McCardle shoved a question at me: "Where's Larch?"

"I don't know."

He threatened me with a cigar. "Mr. Logan, maybe you're telling the truth, and maybe you're not. You better be."

"Of course I am."

"You only met Larch yesterday? Sure of that?"

"Very sure."

"Were you in the theater last night?"

"No."

"Here's a tip: You go ahead with your work and don't worry about anything else, understand?"

I didn't. It was all way beyond me. But I said I did. I was very polite and cooperative. I said all I wanted was to do my job and be on my way. Murder depressed me. I wanted no truck with it. And by the way, where was Mr. Madero?

With that, my visitors departed. I went to sleep puzzled. I woke up puzzled at six o'clock when Tony Braymer phoned to tell me she would buy me a drink if I would drop by the De Lanza bar. And it didn't help my puzzlement any to have a guy pick me up outside the hotel and start tailing me, a small, inoffensive man in a cheap suit.

Before I left the hotel I tried to find Eric and see what about that dinner date. No luck. So I found out that Sally worked at the broadcasting station and called her there, but no luck either. She hadn't seen Eric; and sorry, but she already had a date. So that was that. Maybe Tony would like to dine.

She was waiting for me in the corner all by herself. She wrote *welcome* all over the cushions beside her. I

sat down and admired the green linen outfit she wore and the figure under the outfit. Her stockings were painted on, seams and all, and the legs under the paint were superb. "Surprised?" she asked.

"Amazed. But happy."

"This is for running out on you last night."

"Friar Tuck tuck me home," I said.

"Isn't he a darling!"

I said he was. I said everyone I had met last night was a darling. I had my first good look at her eyes. They were either dark green or black, and they were very bright.

"How about dinner?" I asked.

"I hoped you would bring that up."

"Where?"

"Have you been to Lakeside?"

She had a red car with red leather seats. We drove toward the thunderstorm, another beauty, though it was a bit too far away to be fully appreciated.

Lakeside was a log barn under some cottonwoods, and the lake was a pond with a flock of ducks moping around it, extremely unenergetic, almost weary ducks. Maybe the water was too warm. Another car pulled into the parking lot a few moments after we did, a shabby affair that should have hung its head. The man in the cheap suit was in it. Tony didn't notice him. Tony was smiling into my eyes when he drove alongside.

We went through a bar and out on the porch. We ordered. Then we danced, Langton style. The woman kept her back to her partner and flirted with him over her shoulder. It was called La something or other, and the music was what might be termed regional. You held your partner firmly and poured your soul at her out of your eyes. Tony's profile was more than good. She was the first redhead I ever saw who didn't have freckles, and how did she keep her skin so soft down there on the border chasing steers around? A spy, that's what she was. Hired to find out what I had done with Popol's trick fountain pen in which the papers were hidden. Later, in the men's room, I looked through my pockets, but she hadn't planted a gun on me.

The dinner was better than you get at home when Mother is out of sorts. Apparently this was the favorite Langton hangout. Everyone there looked important and prosperous except my little friend, who was hunched over the bar nursing a beer. About half the men were in uniform with wings on their chests, and that was the only thing wrong with the place. Again I regretted the impulse that had made me take up that plane.

A fine evening. The hell of it was, I wanted to stop being puzzled; I wanted all this to be on the up and up, because Tony could grow on a man. We drove along lonely roads in the half dark with the cool wind on our faces, and our shoulders just touching. We lost our friend in the disreputable suit. But I kept wondering when another car was going to sneak up on us, and a couple of guys with cannons were going to demand my honor. That put a crimp in the evening. We got home safe and sound. She dropped me at the hotel, held my hand tight for a moment, and gave me a smile to remember forever. Then she was gone.

I went through one door of the hotel and out the other. I walked east two blocks, down an alley, west again. No one was following me. The side door of the theater was unlocked.

Very quietly I made my way up the aisle. I slipped into the foyer and stood there listening. Not a sound now. In my breast pocket was a flashlight made like a fountain pen; a man in Merced had sold it to use in blackouts. It worked. I started across the foyer; then my light picked up a figure huddled at the foot of the steps. I felt much better when I discovered it was the dummy and not Spyros Popol or José Manuel Madero or Eric Prentiss or Kelly. I opened the door into the lobby.

Some of the furtive moonlight drifted in, and I could see the coffin and the skeletons and the lonely old vampire. My light was off now. I edged out, let the door close, making sure it would open again, then crossed to the coffin. Footsteps came along the street. I pressed myself against the wall and waited with the coffin between me and the sidewalk. The footsteps stopped. I ventured a quick look. A man was standing just outside staring through the gate, and the man had a cop's uniform on. I willed him away, and away he went.

Then I lifted the coffin lid and slipped my hand in. Even though I knew what was there, it was like picking up a hot wire, and I dropped the lid on my arm. I didn't yell, though. That cop was only a little way up the block. Again I lifted the lid, and this time I held my flashlight inside and switched it on for a second.

Godfrey Larch was in the coffin, and Godfrey Larch was as dead as a frozen lobster tail.

CHAPTER SIX



HE coffin decorating the lobby of the Empire Theater was not, from my standpoint at least, the place for Godfrey Larch's body, but I had no intention of moving it. It was there for a reason, and I thought I knew what the reason was. Popol was an innocent victim, an unlucky guy who happened to stumble on a murder and get himself knocked off. He was the red herring, the issue-confuser. Who would want to murder Popol? Give the police that problem to worry over. Hide the man you wanted out of this life, then come back when you had more time and dispose of him forever. So the cops think Larch killed Popol, and spend the rest of their lives looking for him. As simple as that.

All I had to do now was hang around until the murderer returned to the scene of his crime and trap him in the act. Logan would be a hero. . . .

A cautious man would have called McCardle and arranged for a troop of Arizona rangers armed with frontier model Colts to be on hand, but in this racket you had to take chances. Besides, maybe your murderer would have something to say for himself. Maybe you would hear his tale and decide that justice had been done. And maybe if you reported to the cops, they would be their usual suspicious selves and try to hang it on you.

I heard voices and footsteps. Two men came along the street in no hurry to get anywhere. They were arguing about the fighting qualities of the Japanese and Germans. Both seemed of a mind that they'd rather fight a German any day, and both seemed to be doing nothing constructive about it. They stopped in front of the theater and peered in, but I was well out of sight at the end of the coffin. The display impressed them not at all. They went on talking about the war and how to win it. Then the cop came back. He greeted them both, borrowed a cigarette and said it was a nice night. Then he went on, and the two warriors went on, and I sneaked back into the theater and sat on the steps beside the dummy and had the shakes. It was now twelve twenty-five.

Sitting there in the dark, pulling myself together, I was assailed with some doubts about my plan. A couple of times I was on the verge of hiking upstairs to the office where the phone was, and taking the law into my confidence. I thought about José Manuel and how nice it would be to have him around right now. But the urge passed. I was certain there were a couple of very nice people involved in this, and I wanted to find out why before I used my Nick Harris police whistle.

My plan of campaign was simple, worthy of Joe Stillwell, worthy of Lord Mountbatten, worthy of Timoshenko. Only a man familiar with theaters would have thought of

it. In the projection booth was a switch controlling all the lights. All I had to do was wait in the booth for things to happen. The murderer would come into the theater through the side door. He had to, because the gate across the lobby had a huge padlock on it. He would wheel the coffin into the foyer, remove the corpse, put the dummy back in, return the coffin to the lobby and then make off with Godfrey. At the proper moment I would hit the switch and yell, "Reach for the clouds, stranger!" and that would be it. A masterpiece. Quietly I went upstairs.

I kept my flashlight in my pocket and groped my way along the passageway leading to the balcony. There on my left was the door to the office. Ahead was another door, the one I wanted. It opened on a flight of iron stairs leading up to the projectionist's booth. I found the knob. I turned it. Was that the door I heard? But the door was in front of me and the noise was behind me. I ducked and yelled, and fifteen thunderstorms broke around me.

I FELT as if Gene Krupa was using my head for a drum, hitting it with sticks the size of baseball bats; the guy who used to do the tap-dance on the xylophone seemed to be using my back for his shenanigans. I was being rolled downstairs. I was all tangled up in a plane, and the plane was tangled up in a tree, and someone was saying that's a hell of a way to treat Government property. No, I wasn't. I was stretched out on the dirty carpet upstairs in the Empire Theater, and squatting beside me was José Manuel Madero.

I lay there looking up at him, and he squatted there looking down at me, smoking a Mexican cigarette, his brown face expressionless. I wondered how long it would be before he blinked. I said: "You got the wrong guy."

"How long have you been here?" His voice was mild, without a trace of surprise in it.

A fine question to ask a man in my condition!

"What time is it?"

"In a few moments it will be half-past one." But a moment ago it had been twelve twenty-five.

I tried to sit up. That was a bad idea, a very bad idea.

"Drink this." He had an arm under my shoulders, and was holding a bottle to my lips. The bottle had tequila in it. "It is better with salt and lemon," said Madero.

I suppose it was. But without salt and lemon it went down, and then I could sit up.

"Someone hit me," I said.

"Yes."

"I thought it was you."

"A misconception."

Slowly I got up, let the world spin back to its proper place, then let him lead me into the office. I sat at the battered desk and put my head in my hands.

"Are you all right?"

"Fair."

"Why are you here?"

"I work here," I said. "I was walking past headed for the hotel, and I thought I saw a light. So I came in the side door. I came in quietly and looked around. No light. Nothing. So I came upstairs. Then something hit me."

"You saw no one?"

"Not a soul."

"What time did you get here?"

"Half-past twelve. And you?"

"Perhaps ten minutes ago. I heard someone groaning, and found you."

I wanted to get downstairs. I wanted to have a look at the coffin. If Godfrey was still there, then I could talk to Madero, but I was pretty sure he wasn't there. I said: "I've been frank with you."

"Thank you." He gave me a stiff little bow and a grin.

I pushed myself up. "Do you mind if I leave?"

"You feel badly?"

"I feel horrible."

"I'm so sorry."

I was sorry too. "Did you call McCordle?"

He shook his head. "Should I?"

"That's up to you," I said. My legs were shaky, but they worked. He switched off the light and followed me out, and when I started downstairs, he put my hand on his shoulder. It was like leaning on a chunk of granite.

The dummy still sat on the stairs, her head beside her, and that made the whole business seem a little ridiculous until you remembered she should be out there in the coffin. "Just a minute," I said. "I meant to do this before."

I picked up the head and the body, and he watched me without batting an eye. The dummy and I started for the door, and he jumped ahead and opened it, and I crossed the dark lobby to the coffin. Carefully I put her on the floor. Then I lifted the lid and propped it against the wall. I said, over my shoulder, "She belongs in here. Part of the display."

"Yes," said Madero. He was right beside me, and he flicked on the torch in his hand and poked at the interior of the coffin with the blade of light. The coffin was empty.

It was a good thing the light wasn't on my face. He'd have known all about it then. The light went off. I picked up the dummy and carefully laid her inside, and I put her head where it belonged.

"There," I said. The voice normal. The hands steady. As long as I kept my fists clenched, that is. "Not good, but it will have to do."

"Yes, it will have to do," echoed Madero. A simple man. A trusting man.

"I guess you wonder about us Americans sometimes,"

I said. "This must seem awfully silly to you."

"It does."

"But you'd be surprised how many people it gets into theaters." I was going to leave the lid up, and then I thought maybe there might be bloodstains inside. Tomorrow I'd clear the lobby. Tomorrow I'd take the coffin inside and give it a good going-over, and if it was all right send it back to the owner. Replace it with a modest jungle.

"I am surprised," said José Manuel.

YOU invite a boy and his girl to dinner, and the girl shows up for breakfast next morning, and you with a headache that is the distilled essence of all headaches. a monumental affair, a project worthy of all the aspirin manufacturers in the world. Sally called from home at eight. At eight-thirty I toted the lump on the back of my head into the coffee-shop, and there she was hiding her misery behind a wisp of a smile.

I said good morning and I meant it, though it was only a pretty good morning, hot and dry, with the Popol case still unsolved and me more puzzled than ever and almost an ambulance case. The starched waitress rustled up, and I gave her our order and took two more aspirins. Sally politely withheld comment.

"It's hard to know where to begin, isn't it?" I asked.

A wry smile, all the gratitude in the world in those big brown eyes. "Yes."

"Eric?"

"Who else?" said Sally softly.

"What's he done?"

"I don't know," said Sally. "That's just it. But he's in trouble and I want to help him—only he won't let me help him."

"Didn't he show up last night?" I prompted.

"Yes." The eyes were downcast—a shame, because a man liked to look into those deep clear brown pools.

"What did he do? Call it all off?"

"No."

"What's the matter, then?"

"He didn't show up until two this morning."

"You waited all that time?"

"Of course not. I went to bed. At one he scratched on the screen. He—he—told me to say I had been with him all evening, if anyone asked. He was frightened. Terribly frightened."

I was frightened this morning too, but I didn't have any Sallys around to chatter my teeth at.

"THEN this morning"—a deep sigh—"that little man—Mr. Madero—called me. He said he was looking for Eric to tell him something, and wanted to know if I had seen him, because he hadn't been home all night."

"Of course you said you had."

"Yes. I said he was with me until two. I said he had had a little too much to drink, and maybe he stayed in town at a hotel, because he often did that when he was late."

"Have you talked to Eric this morning?"

"Yes. He called a few minutes after Madero did. And he said he did stay in town. At the De Lanza."

I kept my eyes on her face, and I had other reasons than the fact it was worth keeping one's eyes on.

"I'm afraid," said Sally. "That quarrel at the party—"

"I don't understand," I understated.

"Mr. Popol."

"That's another story," I said.

"Is it?" She studied her hands for a moment. "Night before last—the night Popol was killed—I saw—I saw Eric's car parked around the corner from the court where Godfrey lives. I live close by. He came across the lot—from behind the court—carrying a suitcase, and he put the suitcase in the car and drove away. You know—Godfrey—he's missing. The police are looking for him."

"I know what you think," I said. "You think Larch killed Popol, and Eric helped him get away. Isn't that it?" (I could have gone further. I could have said: "Or do you think the boy knocked them both off? Or do you know he knocked them both off and were you sent around to find out how much I caught on to before I was laid low?")

"I don't know what to think." The tears were very close.

"Why would Eric help Godfrey, when he hated him?"

"Well—" Just "Well," no more. So she didn't think he helped Godfrey. The very unworthy suspicion nagged at me that Eric might be around the corner waiting for a report.

"Don't worry any more," I said.

"You won't"—her eyes made me ashamed—"won't say anything about this?"

"Of course not."

"And if he needs help—"

"To the end," I said.

Smiles like the one she gave me should be hoarded. "It's funny—odd—my coming to you when I—when we met just once. But somehow—" Her hand closed over mine, gave it a gentle squeeze.

And I had been suspicious. I felt like a rat. I paid the check and went as far as the street with her, which she said was far enough because she was sure I had work to do. I bought a paper and sat in the lobby reading about the police department's bewilderment over Popol's murder. The gun belonged to Popol, all right. It had been fired once. There was no mention of Larch, not even a little one.

A bell-hop paged Ben Logan. Phone call for Logan in Booth Two. Someone else wanted my chest to lean on, and I didn't mind sticking it out for that purpose because Kelly Prentiss was on the line and she wanted to know if she sent a car around would I come to breakfast.

I would. . . .

Kelly wore blue slacks and a red shirt, and if she had been standing on a street-corner waiting for a bus, traffic would have been tied up for five blocks. She had no business being anyone's mother. I had looked forward to the idea of having breakfast alone with her, but the

Reverend Hilary Innes was there with a sober expression and a pucker between the eyes. Both said they were very glad to see me.

We all sat down. We all drew a chunk of Persian melon and a cup of coffee. Hilary was noticing the back of my head, and that didn't mean he was observant. A bat couldn't have missed that lump.

"I fell," I said.

"Oh." Kelly looked sorry.

"In the shower. Where's Eric?"

Hilary cleared his throat. "You know. Newspaper men."

"Of course."

Kelly was grateful for my understanding. If she was grieving over Godfrey's absence, she didn't show it, but then you couldn't expect her to if she thought he was still alive. Maybe that's what she thought, too.

"How's the—ah—opening going?" asked Hilary.

"Very well."

"You will, I suppose, change that—ah—that lobby now," said Hilary.

"Today. As soon as possible. It isn't exactly fitting."

"Anything new on the—on Mr. Popol?" asked Hilary.

"They suspect me," I said.

"You?" Kelly was genuinely shocked.

Hilary cleared his throat again. He looked at Kelly. "Shall I?"

"Please," said Kelly.

Then we had some silence, and some eggs and tomatoes and muffins and coffee.

Finally Hilary spoke. "You know, of course, that Mr. Larch is missing."

I nodded.

"Naturally Mrs. Prentiss is worried about him."

I looked to see how worried. Well, pretty much.

"But her son comes first." A good solid statement. "You are probably wondering how this concerns you. It seems to me—ah—this is very difficult really." Then he jumped in head first. "I know I can trust you."

KELLY took a piece of yellow paper from one of her pockets and gave it to me without a word. It was a telegram from Godfrey, and it had been sent from Globe yesterday afternoon. "*Darling. Unexpectedly called away. Business. Will explain later. I love you.*" I scowled at the message for what seemed a suitable time, looked at Hilary and then at Kelly. "But this," I said. "Eric—"

The two patches of mesquite Hilary used for eyebrows moved down over his kind gray eyes. "I was in Globe yesterday afternoon." He spoke quietly, solemnly.

"Still—" One word at a time and let them do the talking.

"I saw Eric there," Hilary went on. "I was driving along and he came out of the Western Union office."

"But why?" I hunted up a knowing look. "Oh—you think he—"

"Yes," said Hilary.

"Why would he send this?"

"Larch is missing." Hilary was graver than a Baptist minister telling his son the facts of life.

"You think—"

"We don't know what to think," said Hilary.

Of course, I had seen Godfrey, so I was one up on them. Or was I? "Curious," I said.

"We're—afraid," said Hilary.

"Have you talked to Eric?"

Kelly's flaxen head indicated she had. "He said he wasn't in Globe. He said—he—we were shielding—protecting Godfrey."

"You feel—Eric—the quarrel—that he might have—"

A vigorous nod from Hilary before I could finish. A haunted look from Kelly. Also from Kelly, another hint. "Night before last—after the party," said Kelly, "Godfrey went into town to meet Mr. Popol."

"He told you that?" I had to say something.

"Yes." Kelly took a deep breath and that agitated the front of the red shirt charmingly. "Mr. Popol called him here at midnight. I took the call. I was right by the phone when Godfrey talked to him. Then Godfrey said he had to go in and see Mr. Popol about something and that he would call me in the morning. Then—" A hopeless gesture. She seemed to want it, so I finished the sentence. "Popol was shot."

Her hand went to her lips and there was pain in her eyes. "The thing to do," I said sagely, "is to call in José Manuel Madero."

Their faces said that certainly was not the thing to do. "If Eric did any shooting, it's going to come out sooner or later," I said.

"Perhaps—" There was a frantic note in Kelly's voice. "Yes," I said. "Perhaps he didn't. Perhaps he is shielding someone. But whom? All right. Then sit tight and wait. That's probably the wise thing to do."

Kelly gave me part of a faint smile, offered the rest to Hilary. "That's what—Mr. Innes—that was his suggestion. I wasn't sure. Oh, I'm not sure of anything."

CHAPTER SEVEN



ONE thing I could be thankful for: Godfrey Larch's murderer was considerate. There wasn't a spot on the lining of the coffin. I wheeled it inside, gave it a good going-over, and then called the mortuary and talked to the proprietor, a man with a glad voice named John Harkins. I thanked Mr. Harkins. I said I needed his coffin no longer and was sending it back.

I hung up and sat in the dingy little office and rubbed the bump on my head. When Mr. Hale the janitor appeared, I sent him out for sandwiches and milk, and we sat on the stairs and talked about life. After a while we got around to Mr. Popol, which was natural because his career had ended just a few feet below us. Begging my pardon, but Mr. Hale thought that Mr. Popol's presence on earth had done nothing to forward civilization.

"How long have you worked for him?"

Mr. Hale took a chunk out of his cowgirl special, eyed me obliquely. "A year."

I maneuvered my sandwich into position so its insides didn't spill on the carpet. "I should think you might have found a better job."

"The job's all right."

"A man of your ability and education—"

He didn't let me finish the sentence. "It gives me time to study."

"You haven't always done this sort of work."

No answer. Maybe his mouth was too full. Maybe that look he shot my way was answer enough.

I returned to Popol: "Any idea who shot him?"

"Why should I?"

"Do you know Godfrey Larch?"

He gave me another look, took a long draft of milk. "I've seen him around."

"With Popol?"

"Once or twice in Popol's office."

I studied the thin, sensitive face and wondered how much Mr. Hale knew. When he wanted to, he could drain all expression from his eyes. Like José Manuel. Only, Mr. Hale was not an Indian. A Spaniard, maybe.

We were interrupted. A loosely constructed man with a very bald head suddenly appeared out of nowhere and wanted to know who the hell had been messing around his projection-booth. Intuitively, I knew he was the projectionist. He was. His name was Septimus Rice, and he had come into the theater through a side door, had gone up to the booth to try to get the six-letter-word machine into some sort of order, and what did he find?

"Somebody walked off with the first reel of that infernal picture," said Septimus. "Now, who in hell would do a thing like that?"

Mr. Hale had a theory. Someone interested in the prevention of adult delinquency had taken the reel, and all we had to do was make the rounds of the salvage depots. I told him very curtly that we were beyond the age of humor. He went out and slammed the door.

"Touchy," said Septimus. "You gotta be nice to him."

"Maybe he killed Popol," I said.

The booth was a mess. Film-cans were all over the place, and half a reel of an old Pete Smith short was draped over the projection machine. Indubitably, Septimus was right. Reel One of "The Invisible Zombie" was missing.

"To hell with Popol!" Septimus said. "What I want to know is, who done this." He pointed to the ribbon of positive on the machine. "Whoever done it didn't know what to look for."

"Don't clean up yet," I told him. Then I led him down to the office. I was doing some wondering. Whoever hit me on the head took the film. When I woke up, José Manuel Madero was there. He might have done it, though I couldn't see why. He wasn't that playful. I put in a call for our Salt Lake exchange and another for Mr. Fenchester in Guaymas. Where in Guaymas? Try La Mar Azul. Septimus put his feet on the desk and brooded. I put my head in my hands and brooded.

"You know," Septimus said, "it looks to me like someone don't want us to open this theater."

The phone rang. Salt Lake was on the wire. Salt Lake would send us another first reel by the next plane, so that was off our chests. I put the receiver down and had to pick it right up again. The operator said she had tried La Mar Azul and every other place in Guaymas she could think of, but no Sylvan Fenchester. I thanked her and told her to keep punching. I looked up, and there in the doorway was José Manuel, smiling at me from under a five-gallon hat.

I wanted to ask him if he was haunting the place. I wanted to tell him to go back to Mexico and leave us with our cup of sorrow. Instead I said brightly: "Good afternoon. Come right in."

He came right in, and Septimus made a very tentative offer of his chair. José refused it, so Septimus started to put his feet back on the desk. The help around here certainly had individuality. I told him to run along. He went, and José and I had the charming office to ourselves.

I said: "I was getting ready to call you."

José decided to be comfortable. He flicked the dust off the chair with a brown handkerchief, hiked up his britches and sat down. "Yes?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Hale said something about some film," said José Manuel. "Was that the reason?"

I nodded. "This morning you didn't walk off with a reel of film, by any chance?"

"Of course not."

"Somebody did," I said.

"But why?"

"There you have me," I said. "This morning I came up here and get hit over the head. This afternoon I find someone has been at our picture."

"Mr. Logan," said José Manuel softly, "suppose we talk man to man. Since you arrived in Langton, a good many things have happened."

So I was on the fire again. I dismissed the observation with a shrug. Could I help it?

"Perhaps you are holding things back?"

I shook my head. "Not me."

"The reel that was stolen—describe it."

"You've found it?"

Just a look, but such a look.

I backed water and remembered how the picture started. First the credits. Then a foreword by a phony professor that this wasn't fiction but life as it is lived in the dark interior of Haiti. Finally an opening shot—stock—of a boat leaving New York harbor. Then a shot—process—of a beautiful heiress brooding at the rail. What I couldn't remember I dug out of my past experience with such pictures. But I didn't get a chance to finish my stirring description. Mr. Hale broke in on us, and behind Mr. Hale was an elderly Mexican with a drooping mustache and his elderly wife with a baby under each arm, and behind them were fifteen assorted Mexican children.

"*Buenas dias*," said the Mexican. "*Buenas dias*, señor. We are here. All of us. The Guttierrez family. The biggest family in the whole Southwest."

José Manuel was over by the window and his face showed not the slightest trace of surprise. Apparently he had decided that things like this happened every day in American theaters.

A boy of fourteen held out a brown hand and asked, in excellent English, for their dough. I explained that the money would be paid when we were certain there was no larger family, that I was busy right now, that I would appreciate it if everyone would go home. I had the name. I had the address. Good-by. . . . Nobody moved. I threw a helpless look at José Manuel. He came to the rescue with a few well-chosen Spanish words, and that was like touching a punk to a string of firecrackers. The members of the Guttierrez family—those who could talk, which was practically the works—had at him.

"They demand a down payment," José Manuel explained when the chatter subsided. "Something to show your good faith."

"How much?"

"Three dollars."

My good faith wasn't worth three dollars, but I shelled out three one-dollar bills and gave them to Guttierrez. He smiled and bowed and said "*Gracias*, señor; a thousand thanks!" and led his tribe out. José Manuel chuckled. I sat down and rubbed my lump.

José Manuel smiled some more; then out of a clear sky he asked: "You fly?"

I sat up. "What makes you think I can fly?"

"A man can ask."

A man can, but why? "I used to be pretty good," I said. "I used to do a lot of it."

"I have a plane."

Maybe he was offering me a job. I waited.

"Godfrey Larch was a flyer." Just like that. *Was*.

"Is that right?"

"He was employed by a Mexican air-line for a time," José Manuel said. "Flying gold-ore out of the mountains back of Durango."

WHAT was I supposed to do? We were getting nowhere. I said: "Shall I finish telling you about the picture?"

"No, thank you."

"Are you looking for Larch?"

"You know where he is?"

I risked a vigorous shake of the head.

"Why do you ask, then?" He had such soft brown eyes, too.

"I sort of figure he might have knocked off Popol," I said. "That's what you're working on, isn't it? Popol's murder?"

"Oh, yes."

"Don't you suspect Larch just a little?"

"Perhaps a little."

"Mr. Madero," I said, trying to sound highly indignant, "you don't suspect me just a little too?"

A faint smile that could mean anything for an answer.

"If you're finished—" I hinted.

"You can go," said Madero. "You don't mind if I look around?"

"The place is yours," I said. "The projection booth is upstairs. The guy who runs the machine should be there. You'll like him. Get him to tell you about the picture. Get him to run it for you."

"Thank you."

"It's been a pleasure," I said. "Thank you."

"*Por nada*," said José Manuel. "And remember: When you have more time—the legend of the Hill of the Terrified Monk."

There it was again. "I'll remember," I said.

I WAS on the stairs when I heard the phone, so I went back up as fast as my head would permit, and grabbed the instrument out of Madero's hands. I hoped it would be Sylvan. It wasn't. It was Eric.

"The cops are going to be looking for you," Eric said cheerily. He had a good voice on the phone, deep, genial. But I was in no condition for such opening remarks. I grunted.

"You're responsible for a minor riot," Eric said. "At the La Luz office. I'm calling from there."

"Families?" I asked.

"Big ones," said Eric.

"I'll be right over." I cradled the receiver. José Manuel was staring at the window, politely pretending he couldn't hear a thing.

"I thought that might be Mr. Fenchester," I said. "It wasn't." No answer. A faint sympathetic smile. "Good-by again," I said, and left him.

Mr. Hale was putting the finishing touches on the jungle in the lobby. It wasn't Haitian, but it would do in a country as dry as southern Arizona.

"Man was here looking for you." Mr. Hale pinned a couple of red paper flowers on a potted rubber plant.

"You mean Guttierrez?"

"That wasn't a man; that was a parade," said Mr. Hale. "Where do you suppose he got all those kids?"

"The stork. Who was the man?"

"Fenchester." He stood back and admired his handiwork. "A bit gaudy, but effective."

"He should be in Guaymas."

"Maybe he should, but he was here looking for you. He was going up until I told him you were closeted with the Mexican Government."

"Where is he now?"

"At the Stockmen's Hotel. Room 322. Go right up."

I started to hoof it, but half a block changed my mind, and I collapsed in a taxi. The driver made the trip to La Luz without a word—that's how hot it was. Not a peep out of him, not even when we sighted the crowd in front of the newspaper office.

It was an orderly crowd. Nobody shoved. Nobody tried to get to the head of the line. Many of the little kids were holding even littler ones, standing barefooted on the hot sidewalk without a whimper. I felt like two rats. I eased my conscience by going into a candy store next door and buying all the candy bars and all-day suckers in the joint. There was a boy of fourteen or fifteen near me, so I put the boxes in his hand and asked him please to pass the stuff around.

"Thank you," said the boy. I hurried into the office.

Eric was sitting on the editor's desk. The editor was a fat fellow named Raoul Garcia, with a pencil behind his ear and long black sleeve-guards, such as grocers used to wear. He looked a bit harried.

"Aren't you ashamed?" Eric wanted to know. He seemed unworried, happy.

I said I was very ashamed—I was hanging my head.

"The photographer got a picture," Eric said. "I sent the AP a copy and also a story. You should get quite a lot of publicity on the stunt."

That would help a great deal: Popol murdered. Larch murdered. People stealing his body right under my nose. Guys whacking me with pike-poles, stealing my film. Women weeping. José Manuel Madero on my trail, and all the big families in Langton on my doorstep. What could I do but thank him?

Gutierrez had lied to me. His was not the biggest family. The Lopez tribe was twenty-two strong, with two sets of twins and one set of triplets. The Martinez family ran to twenty-one. From the hearths of Pedro Ramos and Joaquin Salazar came twenty each. Fie on you, Gutierrez! "Fertile people," I said.

"Counting their cousins and their uncles and their aunts," said Eric cynically.

Garcia was grinning. I felt a little better. We weren't putting anything over on them, at least.

Garcia promised to take care of things. He would weed out the ringers and would pick me an honest group—not too honest, but reasonably so. I tugged at Eric's sleeve and led him out and down the street to the nearest bar.

"Where were you last night?" I asked.

"Tied up."

"Sally's worried about you," I said. "Thinks you're in trouble."

"I'm not."

"Your mother thinks so too."

He swung around. "What is this?"

"Damned if I know," I said. "First Sally, then your mother."

"What jam could I be in?"

"Guess," I said.

His pink cheeks got even pinker, and there were sparks in those blue eyes. He shoved his hand up through his pale hair, said "You—" and stopped.

I finished for him: "You keep your nose out of my affairs, etc, etc. Sure, kid. But I'm not putting it in. I'm an innocent bystander. A victim of womanly concern. And if you get too sore, I'll hold out on you."

He found a fragment of smile. "All right. I'm okay. Nothing to worry about."

I said: "Have they found Larch's body yet?"

He nearly jumped off his stool. "Body? Of course they haven't. He's not dead."

"Then have they found Larch?"

"No."

I told him about the missing film. Eric scowled at his glass. "Why?" he wanted to know.

"I don't know. You wouldn't—well—I wondered how far you'd go for a story."

"Don't be stupid." He took it good-naturedly.

"I thought I'd ask."

"Of course I didn't."

"Then it wasn't you I saw in the alley coming out of the theater this morning. Early this morning."

That got him. Right between the eyes! "Look here," he said angrily. "I don't—"

"All right. I was mistaken. But it was a tall guy. Carrying something. Not you, but the guy I saw."

"I wasn't there."

"Maybe I just thought he was coming out of the Empire, anyway," I said.

I PAID the check and got off the stool. Eric's hand shot out and closed on my arm.

"Wait, Ben," he said.

I waited. He led me toward the door. I knew he had a lot to say, knew he was having a hell of a time finding how to say it. We were outside before he opened up. He said quietly: "Ben, I don't know you very well. But—" A wave of his hand. I understood it. "Maybe you saw things you can't understand, and maybe you'll hear things," he went on. "Forget them, will you?"

I nodded. "They're forgotten."

"Get this straight, though. I haven't done anything really wrong."

"All right, Eric."

We walked half a block in silence. Then he squeezed my shoulder roughly, turned suddenly and walked away. I headed for the Stockmen's Hotel and Mr. Fenchester.

CHAPTER EIGHT



OW, why would the head of Far Western Theaters put up at the Stockmen's Hotel? The Stockmen's was clean enough but it wasn't the sort of place you'd expect to find Mr. Fenchester in. He didn't like spittoons, leather chairs in the lobby and no elevator.

He liked flash and glitter, and a bar with three or four pretty wenches undermining their constitutions. I found the stairs and went up with the alacrity of a grandmother climbing the Mount Whitney trail for the first time.

This Mr. Fenchester was not the man you saw when you entered the paneled offices in the Far Western theater building in the capital of Brigham Young's empire. He was barefooted, for one thing. For another, he wore only an undershirt and a pair of pants, and his striped suspenders trailed after him. On the floor at the foot of the bed was an open Gladstone bag, and nestling in the shirts and underwear was a gun.

"Good afternoon," I said cheerfully.

"Hello, Ben." His voice had little life to it.

"I thought you were in Guaymas," I said.

He didn't bother to reply.

"I called you there," I continued. "Someone walked off with part of our picture. They're sending down another reel."

"Good."

It was time to ask for a raise, and a less loyal man would have taken advantage of Sylvan's condition. I asked: "Was there something?"

Sylvan stretched out on the bed, propped himself up on a pillow, stared at me glumly. "I don't like this Popol business."

I didn't like a lot of things.

"Larch was working for me," said Sylvan. "The police know it," he added. "A cop was nosing around my office in Salt Lake yesterday afternoon."

Through the open window behind me came the sound of voices. Some men down in the alley were loading a truck, being shockingly profane about it.

"Been working for me about a year," said Sylvan. "A mining deal."

It was sweet of him to take me into his confidence. Pals.

"Under cover," he continued. "Popol was in it too."

"Mexico?" I asked.

He shot a sharp glance my way. "Never mind that."

I waved it aside.

"What did the Mexican have to say?" He tried to be casual.

"He thought maybe Larch and I were buddies."

"Does he think Larch killed Popol?"

"I don't know about him. But the Langton police force does. There's a secret warrant out for Larch."

Poor old Sylvan! Was that look in his eyes fear, or was he just overcome by the heat? Why not give him something else to worry about?

"Someone slugged me early this morning," I stood by the bed, looking grave. "In the theater. Around twelve-thirty."

"What were you doing in the theater at that hour?"

"I was out with a lady."

He waited and stared at me hard.

"Her name is Tony Braymer," I said. "She owns a ranch near Nogales."

He found his voice, where he had been stewing it to a angry broth. "What are you driving at?"

"I'm trying to explain."

"You're hinting at something."

"I'm not hinting. You said you didn't like the Popol business. Neither do I. Not any part of it. I'm not a guy that likes to find a gunnysack in his hands."

"Go on," He spoke in a dry sort of whisper.

"Maybe you should do the talking," I suggested.

He had a glass in his hands, and he could have heaved it at me. He didn't. He said: "See here, Ben—"

"Or shall I tell Madero where to find you?"

He made a weak attempt at bullying. "Why should I tell you anything? Go ahead. Call this Madero guy and see what it gets you."

"It won't get me anything. What I'm thinking about is what it will get you, Mr. Fenchester."

He thought that over. He asked: "What is it you don't understand, Ben?"

"Why Popol was murdered. Why someone wanted that can of pop. And you might toss in the reason I was banged around."

"Now, Ben! Let's try and make some sense out of this. You think I'm mixed up in it, don't you?"

"You are," I said.

"Be sensible. Just what part did I play, then?"

"Maybe you whacked me."

"Ridiculous." He tried to laugh, and the laugh sounded faintly hollow. "One thing: you don't accuse me of killing Popol."

"Give me time."

"I ought to fire you."

"Go ahead," I said. "I'm aching to be fired. I'll go to work for Madero the minute you do."

THAT stopped him. He began to wheedle. This was very foolish. Two grown men quarreling over something that affected them not at all, really. He was worried sure, but only because Larch was on his payroll, and now Larch was missing, and it might give Far Western some bad publicity.

Well, we might as well have the whole deck in front of us. I grinned across the room at him and said: "Larch didn't kill Popol. He couldn't, because he got killed at the same time."

I couldn't see his face, because it was turned the other way. But what I said hit him hard, made him speechless for a moment. When he did speak, it was to ask hoarsely: "How do you know?"

"I saw his body."

"Where?"

"In the coffin in the lobby. Then someone took it away."

"Oh, my God!" Sylvan moaned.

He sat up on the bed. "Listen, Ben. I'm not in town, understand. You don't know where I am. You've got to trust me. From now on you get one hundred and fifty dollars a week. How does that sound?"

"How big a sack do I hold?"

"Everything's all right." He tripped along like a kid leaving school. "Just go ahead with the opening like nothing had happened, sec. I'll keep in touch with you."

I could have walked out on him. I could have hunted up José Manuel or McCardle and come clean. But I had a couple of reasons not to. Sure, Sylvan was mixed up in this, and so was Tony. But so was Eric and so maybe were the Reverend Innes and Kelly and God only knew what other nice people. Better to wait and let the stew simmer a while longer.

"All right," I said. "I'll play along."

His sigh was a masterpiece. "Thanks, Ben. You won't regret it."

Maybe I wouldn't. I went out hoping I wouldn't, down the creaking old stairs to the street. Someone was running

toward me. It was Sally, and tears were crossing her cheeks. My arm went out and stopped her.

"Oh," she cried. "You! Oh, Mr. Logan, they've arrested Eric!"

I pulled her close to me, put my hands on her shoulders.

"They found Godfrey Larch's body in a cañon," Sally sobbed. "A man saw Eric putting it there."

CHAPTER NINE



ALLY was not entirely accurate, but the girl was upset, and you couldn't blame her. No one had actually seen Eric deposit Godfrey's body in the little cañon in the Langton mountains just north of Painted Rocks road.

What Jake Farley, who called the attention of the police to Larch's presence in the cañon had seen made it look bad for Eric, but there could be another six-foot-seven youth driving a Chrysler station-wagon in Arizona. I didn't talk to Farley, but I read his statement, and I had a few words with the desk sergeant. Farley was an ex-New York bank teller with sinus trouble, who had built himself a little stone house in the hills and was raising Toggengurg goats.

"Early this morning," Farley said in his statement, "my goats started kicking up a row, so I went out to the pen. It was moonlight. I saw a car parked about a quarter of a mile from the house. I didn't pay much attention, because often cars park near my place when it is moonlight. The goats were all right, and I was starting back to the house when I heard someone crashing through the brush down in the cañon. That made me suspicious, so I walked up the road to the car. It was a Chrysler station-wagon with an Arizona license. I hid behind a rock, and pretty soon a man came up out of the cañon and got in the car and drove on east. I didn't see the man's face, but he was extremely tall, and I'm sure it was Eric Prentiss."

"I went back to bed. This morning it struck me funny that anyone should be down in that cañon at that time of night. So I went down and had a look around. There is a dry stream-bed at the bottom of the draw, and I saw tracks in the stream-bed. I hunted around and found a mound of sand under some mesquite. A body was buried in the sand."

The body, it seemed, was Godfrey. The license number Farley gave the police was registered to Eric Prentiss. . . .

Sally had stopped crying, but she looked miserable. The desk sergeant was sympathetic. As cops go, he wasn't so bad, a man of fifty named Paul Lazarus whose job seemed to agree with him. He was nice and fat.

"Nobody can see Mr. Prentiss right now," said Lazarus. He explained that Eric was having a sort of conference with Chief McCardle and a couple of other limbs of the law.

"Has he got a lawyer?" I asked. He hadn't. And so far, his mother hadn't been notified. Sally wasn't notified, either. The news man at the radio station had told her of Eric's trouble. I borrowed Lazarus' phone and called Kelly, but she was out. I called AWVS headquarters, and she wasn't there. The Reverend was in, working on his sermon, so I told him to use an old one next Sunday and see if he could lasso Mrs. Prentiss. The news about Eric seemed to set him back on his heels.

I dropped down on the bench beside Sally, took her hand and squeezed it, and she dug around in the darkness and came up with something that resembled a smile.

"He didn't do it," I said. I meant he didn't kill Godfrey. I wasn't so sure about that, but why not be big about the business? There were other things, however, I was sure of. Her hand was warm and soft and very small, and I had to wrestle with temptation, had to stick its head between the ropes and bear down. I gave her hand a squeeze

and went to work on Lazarus. Couldn't we see McCordle for just a moment? He assured me I would have to wait until McCordle finished with Eric. I was getting set to explain to Lazarus in what low esteem I held cops, when José Manuel Madero appeared through the street door, a gold-headed umbrella in one hand and his five-gallon hat in the other. He bowed to Sally. He bowed to me. He told the desk sergeant it was a good afternoon.

"Go right in," said Lazarus, and motioned toward the door marked *Private*. That set my mind at rest on one point. José Manuel wasn't here in the interests of the Prentiss family.

I got between him and the door. "We'd like to see Eric," I announced. The man certainly had beautiful teeth. He let me look at them, then moved around me. I nodded toward Sally. "You know how it is," I added.

Another smile, and he was gone. I wondered if it would help Sally to give her hand another little squeeze.

Her voice reached way down inside me and did things to my heart. "Why did he do it?"

"Let's not judge the boy," I said. "Maybe he didn't do anything."

"He was out there in the cañon. I'm sure he was."

So was I. "Farley didn't see him burying Godfrey." Not much to offer a lady, but it was the best I had.

"I want to see him so," Sally said.

AS though her desire made itself felt in the other room, the door opened and McCordle's pleasant face looked out. He beckoned. We rose and followed into his fine air-conditioned office, decorated by José Manuel, Mr. Oswald and a big photograph of McCordle in a Charro outfit on a snow-white horse. The horse looked resigned.

"In there," said McCordle, motioning toward a door leading into another office.

"May I see him?" asked Sally in a faint voice.

"Go right in," said McCordle.

I started to follow her, but McCordle said I was to wait right here. What else could I do? And no chance to tell Sally to keep her eyes open for dictaphones, because she was through the door and the door was closed. I got one look at Eric. I was spared the actual reunion. All I heard was Sally crying: "Oh Eric, Eric!"

José Manuel threw a tender smile at the door. McCordle lowered himself in his chair, took a cigar from his pocket, lit it and puffed contemplatively. Oswald yawned. I said: "Well, gentlemen, did he confess?"

No answer. José Manuel gave his attention to the street outside the window. Oswald yawned again. McCordle regarded me through a haze of cigar-smoke. Nothing for me to do but chew my fingernails.

"Mr. Logan," said McCordle after a while, "we've been very patient with you."

"Why not?"

"You know why not. You're asking for trouble, and you're going to get it."

A shrug was the only answer I could think of.

"You need a chart?" A leaf of his cigar had come unstuck so he wet it and pressed it into place. "The morning after Popol was shot, you and Prentiss went out to his apartment. Early this morning you entered the Empire Theater, where Mr. Madero found you. About that time Prentiss was burying Larch's body in the Langton Mountains."

"I don't see the connection," I said.

"We've talked to Prentiss." The ominous tone, the he's-told-us-everything tone. I knew now it was a fishing expedition, because what could Eric have told them about me?

"So he won't talk," I said.

Madero turned from the window and tossed me a smile. Understanding, that fellow.

"He talked plenty," said McCordle. "You going to let him put all the blame on you?"

"What blame?" I sent a glance in Madero's direction, hoping to catch him off guard. His expression was as readable as a Henry James novel.

McCordle came up with another question: "What were you doing in the theater this morning?"

"Didn't Mr. Madero tell you?"

"I gave him your explanation," said José Manuel.

"You see, he believes me," I told McCordle.

"Of course I believe you," said José Manuel.

"I don't," McCordle grunted. "Saw a light, huh! Went in to investigate." He leveled a finger at me. "What about the film?"

"That puzzles me too," I said.

Madero caught McCordle's eye, and his glance asked a question. Madero nodded.

The Mexican's soft voice stroked my hair: "Mr. Logan, we know you had nothing to do with the murders. But we feel you can help us. For some reason you have given us half-truths. Perhaps you are shielding someone. That is foolish, Mr. Logan. Very foolish. Some things you have done seem a little hard to understand. It may be that you are afraid, that you may be in danger?"

"What's there to be afraid of?"

"Perhaps Mr. Popol and Mr. Larch asked the same question," said Madero.

I resorted to the old head-shaking dodge. "I wish I could help. Believe me, I'm bewildered." (And that's no lie, gentlemen, you never saw such a bewildered guy.)

Madero spoke to McCordle: "Perhaps we are misjudging Mr. Logan."

My glance thanked him. McCordle made no comment. Oswald cleared his throat in a very nasty way. "I won't leave town," I said hastily, trying to keep my foot in the door. "I'll go about my business quietly and keep in touch with you."

"Don't you want to speak to Eric?" asked McCordle.

Not particularly, but maybe that's what McCordle wanted. "Well—if it's no trouble."

The Chief heaved himself up, ambled over to the door and knocked. It took a second knock to bring Sally to the door. She didn't look too happy, and neither did Eric.

"Hello, Ben," Eric said.

SALLY'S look at me had desperation in it. I tried to reassure her by my gaze. Then McCordle had her by the arm, and I was in the room with Eric, and the door was closed. I headed for the nearest picture, a print that showed a handful of brave pioneers standing off thousands of Apaches, and looked behind it.

"No use," said Eric. "I've been all over the room. Anyway, McCordle doesn't play that way."

"He's a cop," I said flatly.

"He's all right," Eric said.

"You should have heard what he said about you. He intimidated you talked. You blamed me."

Eric laughed. "Nuts!"

"Sure. Why the hell didn't you pick another cañon? You should know this country by now."

"Who, me?"

"You. Who killed them, Eric?"

He laughed again.

"You're a nice kid," I said, "but not too bright. If you know who did it, you might as well tell them."

"All right. I killed them," said Eric. "Maybe you better run along."

"And let you take care of yourself?" I said. "Any man who tries to cart off bodies can certainly take care of himself."

"Who said I carted off a body?"

"Oh. You went out there to look for one?"

"Sure. That's it."

"Who put him there?"
 "How should I know?"
 "Then how did you find him?"
 "By watching the buzzards," Eric said. "Now beat it and leave me with my thoughts."
 "Good-by," I said.
 "Tell Mother I love her," Eric said. "Tell her not to forget to feed my white mouse."
 "And I'll see that Sally is fed."
 "That's white of you."
 We shook hands solemnly. I opened the door into McCordle's office. Then I stopped. Juan Aruba was standing in the middle of the room, and over by the door was the Reverend Hilary Innes.
 "That's how it was," Aruba was saying quietly. "They had it coming, so I killed them both."

CHAPTER TEN



HERE was the Reverend by the door, and there was Aruba confessing a minor massacre as calmly as though he were booking a Gene Autry film for a Saturday matinee. I felt myself shoved roughly aside. My gigantic young friend bore down on Aruba, crying, "You damn' fool, Juan!"

Aruba turned to him and said wearily: "It's no use, Eric."
 "Juan!" Eric cried.
 "They know now," Aruba said.

Madero was knitting a sock with four steel needles and apparently paying no attention to remarkable proceedings that would have made even my Aunt Lucy, a superlative knitter, drop ten stitches. It shocked me, so I looked at Sally. Her eyes were full of love and wonder.

Eric stood close to Aruba, looking down at him; and if ever a youth was upset, that youth was Mr. Prentiss.

Aruba gave him a ghost of a smile.

"Shall I continue?" he asked.

"Sit down, Eric," McCordle ordered sharply.

Eric hesitated, frowning at Aruba. Their eyes met and held for a moment; then the tall youth shrugged and moved slowly our way.

Aruba gave a couple of small coughs. "I was waiting in the foyer behind the curtains," he said. "They came down the stairs together. I shot Popol first. Larch tried to get back upstairs, and I shot him." It was like picking up a magazine and starting to read the second installment of a story when you've missed the first. "I was going to leave them there," he went on. "You see, it wasn't planned. I hadn't thought of killing them when I went upstairs. It was when I was waiting and found the gun and the box of cartridges in the drawer that I decided to do it. I saw they were both dead. Then I went to the door and opened it a little and looked through the lobby at the street. No one was around. No one had heard the shots. That was when it occurred to me to put the blame on Larch."

"Two shots," said Oswald as though talking to himself.

"Yes, two," said Aruba. "Naturally—one for each. Upstairs was the box of cartridges. I went up and took one, removed one of the empty shells from the gun and replaced it. Then I wiped the gun clean. That dummy was in the office, so I threw it downstairs beside Popol's body. The head came off. I removed one of the curtains, and wrapped Larch in it. I carried him into the foyer."

Neat, shipshape, nothing overlooked. For a man without a plan of action, Juan had done all right.

Aruba sighed. "I carried Larch's body down through the theater to the side door," he said quietly. "My car was in the alley. I put the body in the car and drove out of town, out Painted Rocks road. I put the body in the cañon. Yesterday afternoon I told Eric. He wouldn't believe me." He smiled our way. "Would you, Eric?"

"No," Eric said.

"That's why he went out there this morning," Aruba said. "Isn't it, Eric?"

Eric said nothing for a moment. Eric sat there looking at his big hands. When he did speak, his voice was barely audible: "Yes."

"There you are, gentlemen," said Aruba calmly.

Madero made a small gesture with his hands—resigned, fatalistic. Well, Aruba wasn't really his relative—only his wife's cousin, and who cared about in-laws? I transferred my attention to the parson. His face was drawn, and he looked very tired and very sad. But relieved! I was sure of that. A glance at Sally told me she was relieved too. Not Eric. His head was bowed, and he seemed to be doing some heavy thinking.

"I'm sorry, Juan," McCordle said, and he meant it.

"Thanks, Mac," Aruba replied. "I've only myself to blame."

Why, that's what I wanted to know. That was one of the things I wanted to know. And boys, I wasn't dreaming when I peeked into the coffin in the Empire lobby.

Where I come from, a confession like Juan's would merit immediate incarceration, and perhaps a kick or two in the stomach. I waited for Madero to go into operation. If he was a detective, now was the time for him to prove it. He disappointed me. He let McCordle ask questions.

"How did you happen to open the desk drawer, Juan?" asked McCordle.

Aruba didn't hesitate. "I was there awhile. Restless. Sort of an idle gesture, I suppose."

"You didn't know the gun was there?"

"No, Mac."

"You're certain it was you and not Eric who put Larch's body into the cañon?"

Aruba nodded vigorously. "I put it there, Mac." He jerked his thumb at Eric. "Ask him."

Eric didn't wait to be asked. "That's right."

McCordle smiled. "Thanks, Juan."

"That's all right, Mac."

I had had enough of this polite version of homicide detection, so I stood up and wondered, audibly, if anyone minded if I did my chores. No one minded. Everyone was polite. They thanked me. I thanked them. We shook hands all around, and out I went.

There was an expensive roadster parked at the curb, and Mrs. Prentiss was in it, and Mrs. Prentiss was staring straight ahead. I went right past her and took a good look at her face; but if she saw me, she paid no heed. She looked like someone who has been lost a long time.

I went to the De Lanza and ordered a Planter's Punch. I was right in the middle of it when I heard my name called, and turning, saw the Reverend standing in the door. What was there to do but gulp down the rest of my drink and follow him outside.

"Busy?" Hilary asked.

"Not very. Were you looking for me, or was it chance?"

"I was looking for you," said Hilary. "How about coming out to my place?"

Apparently Hilary needed me, so I went along. He gave me a rum drink with mint in it, long and cool. His study was shabby but comfortable, with a door leading into a tiny garden, and there was a homemade cooling system in the window that worked very well. On the mantel above the fireplace in the corner was a picture of Kelly Prentiss.

IT was his move, but he was taking an unconscionable time to make it, so I asked: "I missed the opening. Why did he knock them off?"

"Money. They took all he had, and were about to take his theater."

"In a mining deal, perhaps?" I studied his face.

"I don't know. He didn't go into what it was all about."

"Go on," I urged. "Fill in what I missed."

"You didn't miss much. That night Popol called Aruba at home. After the party, that was. Told him to go to the Empire and wait for him. Told him to go in through the side door because it was open. Juan went, and after a while Popol and Larch came in and said their minds were made up: they were moving in. Juan asked for time. They wouldn't give it to him. So downstairs he went, and that's where you came in."

"The liar," I said.

Hilary choked. He removed his spectacles and looked around for something to wipe them on. Finding nothing else, he pulled out his shirt-tail.

"Popol didn't use the Empire office," I said. "So what was his gun doing in the drawer?"

"I don't know," he answered nervously. "But he said—why—why would a man confess to such an awful crime if he didn't commit it?"

"Don't you know the answer?"

HE wouldn't look at me. He put up a hand and rubbed his temple, smoothing the gray hair back, and I was sorry I had asked the question.

"Forget it," I said. "All right. Let's say he killed them. Maybe he did and maybe he didn't, but that's what he wants McCadle to believe, and I'm not going to spoil his show."

His sigh came up from the bottom. "That's why I asked you to come out here."

I wasn't exactly surprised.

"There was a coffin in the theater lobby," Hilary said. "You looked in that coffin the other night, didn't you?"

I thought that over. I could lie about it, but this wasn't the best place in the world to be stewing untruths. "Yes," I said. "When did you learn the body was in the coffin?"

"Today. Eric told me as we were leaving the police station. He said you had seen him carrying the body out of the theater and to ask you to hold off saying anything."

"Who is he protecting?"

The minister's eyes were sad, and he waited a little while before replying.

"I don't know," he said finally.

I didn't like it. The water was getting too deep and too muddy, and someone who had no business in this was going to find himself drowned. Hilary must have been watching me closely, digging right into me with those sharp, kind eyes, because he said softly: "I don't like it either, Ben, but what can I do? There's so much I don't understand."

He got up and roamed around the room. The fan in the cooling system hummed drowsily.

"Tell me about Larch," I said.

He stopped his wandering, leaned on the desk. "It was through me he met Mrs. Prentiss."

There was something for a man to think about.

"He came here a year and a half ago," Hilary went on. "From Mexico. He looked me up, because he knew Lyle Holden, my nephew in Taxco. I didn't like him particularly, but he was nice enough, so I introduced him to people I knew, and they started having him out. Five or six months ago Lyle came through on his way to San Francisco, and I happened to mention Larch. Lyle said Larch had to leave Mexico, that he had got in wrong with Cardenas during the last election. Didn't know why exactly, but it had something to do with work he did for General Almazan, who was running against Cardenas' man, Comacho. Comacho won the election."

"Madero said Larch was doing some flying down there," I offered. "Taking gold-ore out of the mountains around Durango."

"He was a flyer. I know that much. Mrs. Braymer has a plane, and Larch flew it now and then."

"Oh, he did, did he?" (What was Tony doing with airplanes—herding cows? That was possible. I knew a man

once who rounded up wild horses in a plane.) "Mrs. Braymer and Larch were pretty good friends?"

"Oh, yes."

"Mrs. Prentiss introduce them?"

"No. They knew each other before. In Mexico City, I think."

Would that explain why Tony and Larch seemed to be chummy? Larch and Tony, Larch and Popol and Fenchester, Larch and Aruba. Mining deals and murders. And was Popol waiting at the airport for the man who got off the plane? But try and make the pieces fit!

"I know what you are thinking," Hilary said unexpectedly. "Don't, please."

I frowned at him. "What's that?"

"Mrs. Prentiss wasn't jealous of Mrs. Braymer," Hilary said.

Then he noticed my glass was empty, and excused himself for being such a bad host. Could he get me another? I wrestled with temptation. Well, a very short one. He trotted out to the kitchen, and I heard him talking in Spanish to the old Mexican woman who washed his surplice and kept the buttons sewed on his shirt. About that time the doorbell rang. The voices stopped, and all I could hear for a couple of minutes was the sound one makes when mixing a drink.

The woman must have answered the bell, because footsteps came along the hall and she was chattering at him in Spanish, saying something about a Señora Aruba. I suddenly became very interested in the bookshelves. The door opened. Hilary came through it, and I turned and accepted the proffered glass.

"Will you excuse me?" he asked.

"Go ahead," I said. "I'll finish this and run along."

"Don't hurry. I may only be a moment."

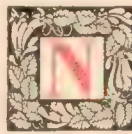
"I better go on," I said, nodding toward the door into the garden. "I can go out that way?"

"Yes." He shook my hand and smiled, and it seemed to me he looked relieved. Then he hurried from the room.

Down went the drink and out I went, closing the door softly behind me. I didn't intend to eavesdrop. But could I help it if Mrs. Aruba wouldn't keep her voice down? When I went quietly by the window looking into the parlor, I heard her cry: "Hilary, they'll find out the truth. I know they will."

Like jesting Pilate, I asked myself what truth was, but didn't wait for an answer.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



IGHT was coming on, and what does a lonely man do in a strange town if he is too bashful to ask the girl at the cigar counter for a date? I gave Tony one more chance. The girl at the De Lanza switchboard told me to wait a moment; then there she was on the wire, her voice low and vibrant and warm. Dinner? Of course. In an hour.

I shaved. I took a shower. I put on a silk sport shirt and a white Palm Beach suit. An hour, Tony had said. There was still thirty minutes to go.

I went down the street past the theater and decided the lobby jungle wasn't so bad. Not as spectacular as the coffin *motif* perhaps, but one thing about it, there was no place to hide bodies. And who put the body in the coffin anyway, and why? I sauntered along, wondering. I rounded the corner, and there was the flight of steps leading up to Popol's dreary office. I wondered some more, about Miss Arbuckle, and who took girls like that out, and Spyros and his bonfire, and Popol's gun in the wrong desk. Twenty-five minutes to waste, and Popol's office was a good place to waste them. I had the key Sophie had given me, so again I climbed those dark and dingy stairs.

The door was closed, but it wasn't locked. The ante-room was dark and empty. I crossed it and opened the other door and walked in.

A sound like a sob stopped me in my tracks. My hand fumbled along the wall, found the light-button and pressed it. All the darkness fled, and there at the desk was Spyros Popol with his head on his arms, crying his old heart out. He lifted his head and stared at me.

"Sorry," I said.

He rose, leaned on the desk. "You wanted something?"

Yes, I wanted to get out of the place. I wanted to leave him with his tears. The only thing I could think of to tell him was that Fenchester was still in town.

"Yes." His tone indicated he knew it.

"Good night," I said, flicked the switch down and went away. I was in the bar putting myself outside a daiquiri when Tony appeared.

"Can't you even smile?" asked Tony, putting her trim little hips on the stool beside me.

I smiled. I said: "You're beautiful."

LA CASA DE LAS BONITAS was not my idea. All I wanted was a steak-and-kidney pie, or a slab of rare roast beef or a trifling tenderloin. But Tony wanted *chile con queso*, *enchiladas* and similar indigestibles. She also wanted to dance the Langton version of the Conga, which I discovered was called La Varsuviana. Anyway, how was I to know that José Manuel and the two gentlemen who had accompanied him to the airport that fateful evening were in the House of the Beautiful Girls, playing dominos and stuffing their trim stomachs with stewed chicken. We had our knees under the table before I realized who our next-door neighbors were, and then it was too late. José Manuel was on his feet bowing and saying, "How do you do." The G-men rose too, but they didn't bow. They seemed to think Tony was worth looking at. She was.

There was an orchestra of a sort—four pieces and mostly strings. Presently they struck up the tune that goes with that native dance, and out on the floor we went, with Tony's long-lashed eyes sparkling, her full lips smiling.

"Those two men," I said; "they seem to know you."

Tony shook her head. "Never saw them before."

"They look like cops to me," I said.

"Do they?" Her shoulders touched my chest, and what innocent eyes you have, Grandma!

I brought up the subject of Sylvan Fenchester. I said: "You don't know how surprised I was when I found out you knew him."

"Do I?"

"I understood him to say you did."

"I meet so many people." And no guile in the tone either, or in those lovely eyes.

Two men connected with the Fenchester enterprises dead already, and maybe you better stay the hell out of this, Logan; maybe you better stick to compliments. But back there in the dark an old man was crying with his head on his arms. I said: "Madero tells me you knew Godfrey Larch in Mexico City."

The eyes weren't soft any more; the lids drew over them for a moment. She seemed to be trying to catch her breath "That's interesting," she said—and what was I driving at, saying Madero told me she knew Larch in Mexico. There was no smile on those full lips now.

"Making conversation," I said humbly. "That's all."

"I think I underestimated you, Mr. Logan."

"Well?"

About that time the musicians lay down on the job, so we went back to our table and our steaming dishes.

"That's what I thought," Tony said, so softly that only I could hear her. "I've changed my mind."

"Now what am I?"

"Guess," said Tony, and began delicately downing the ingredients for six cases of acute indigestion.

By the time we danced again, the sparkle was back in her eyes, and she was almost cuddly—almost. She wanted an explanation, so what could I do but give it to her. "They've found Larch's body," I said.

She missed a step. "Godfrey—you mean—"

"I mean Godfrey," I said. "They found his body this afternoon up in the hills."

"Oh, no."

A door led through the back into a small garden, and without a word Tony led me to the door and out, and we stood in the half-dark close together. "Poor Kelly!" she said softly. "Poor, poor Kelly!" Suddenly she gripped my arms hard. "Why didn't you tell me before?" I didn't answer. "You're a detective," she said fiercely. "Aren't you?"

"No."

"Who killed them, Ben?"

"I don't know."

"Eric didn't, did he, Ben?"

"The police are talking to him and to Aruba."

"How awful!"

"Is Aruba a friend of yours?"

"Of course. I've known him for a long time. I've known them all for a long time." She took a deep breath that was almost a sob. "Poor Kelly!" she whispered again. She looked up, and her eyes were clouded with thought. "What's behind it all, Ben?"

"I wish I knew."

"Let's go inside," Tony said. "Let's not talk about it any more."

We went back to the table, and José gave us a smile and bought a round of brandies. When the music started and I asked Tony to dance, she shook her head.

"Why not?"

Two reasons. One was what had happened. The other was that she had to get up early to see a man about some cattle. Tomorrow night, perhaps. She rose.

I said good night to José Manuel and his pals, paid the check and followed her out to the parking lot. I looked at the sky, and the moon looked back, and a cool dry wind ran past. It was early yet, and there was magic all around us; why go home?

"I must." She slid under the wheel and patted my hand. I went around the car and got in. I took her face in my hands and bent toward her.

"No, Ben," she whispered. "Not yet."

She stopped at my hotel just long enough to let me hold her hand. No, no more drinks. Tonight, sleep. Tomorrow night—the moon would still be there.

"Good night, Ben."

"Good night," I said.

"Be careful, Ben. Be oh-so-careful, darling."

I stood on the curb and watched her drive away. Then I went upstairs. As I reached the door, I heard my phone ringing, but it had stopped when I got inside. I jiggled the hook, got the switchboard.

"I'm here now," I said.

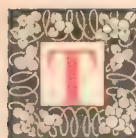
"Mr. Logan?"

"Yes."

"There was a call for you, but the party hung up," the girl said. "They left a message. They said for you to go to the Stockmen's at once, to Room 322."

The room was cold. I opened a window and stood there trying to decide whether to let Sylvan go until morning, or trot obediently down the street. I might as well heed the call of duty.

THERE was no one in the old lobby, not even the clerk. A sign on the desk told you to push the button if you wanted service. I ignored the sign and climbed the stairs. I knocked. No one answered, so I turned the knob and pushed and the door swung open. Sylvan was in the room all right, but he was in no condition to talk. Someone had shot him in the right temple.



HE lights were on and the shades were down, and there on the bed was Sylvan in his shirt-sleeves and his trousers. He had died with his shoes off. On the floor by the bed was a quilt. A gun lay near it on the carpet, and it looked like the same gun I had seen in his bag awhile ago. I touched his cheek with my fingertips, and knew he hadn't been dead long.

My fingerprints were on the doorknob, and probably on a good many other things in the room. And here I was, and here was Sylvan, and here was the gun. But there wasn't any telephone. That was something to think about, for a man who had got a call to come to 322. A man could think a whole lot better with the door locked, so I locked it. I did some tall thinking about all the people I knew who were wandering around Langton.

Sylvan's cowhide bag was on the floor near the open closet door, and someone had been very careless with the contents. Some of his junk was spilled out on the floor. In the closet I found his coat neatly suspended from a hanger, so I brought it out and had a look at what was in the pockets. The only thing interesting was a wallet with five hundred dollars in it, but a man has to have some scruples. I put the wallet back and looked in the bathroom. Nothing. Nothing in the dresser drawers. Nothing in Sylvan's pants pockets but a handkerchief, a key-ring and a four-bit piece. And why should one spend the night in this hot place, when one had an air-conditioned room down the line! Only—who was that coming along the hall with such a heavy tread?

Very quietly I raised the shade. The window was open, and the fire-escape was the most inviting one I had ever seen. I climbed out and pulled the shade down just as someone banged on the door. McCardle's voice said: "All right. See if you can open it." I waited to hear no more.

Had McCardle looked out at once, he might have seen me. He didn't. I suppose the shock of finding Mr. Fenchester stretched on the bed gave him pause. I dropped into the alley, took one look at the pale oblong of light three stories up, and then set about breaking the world's record for the two-hundred-and-twenty-meter dash.

My destination was the nearest drugstore with a phone booth in back. I dialed the Santa Cruz. Was that a man or a woman who called Mr. Logan and left word for him to go to the Stockmen's?

"A woman," the girl said.

With a nice husky voice? Yes, the voice was nice enough, and a little husky. The phone-girl sounded coy. I gave her my love and hung up.

José Manuel Madero was not in his room at the De Lanza. The switchboard didn't know where he was. Tell him Logan called.

"Oh, Mr. Logan," the operator said. "Here's a message for you. Mrs. Braymer had to leave town suddenly, and she wanted you to know."

"Thank you."

"She went to the Ox Bow ranch," the girl went on. "She said to tell you. It's to the right, ten miles this side of Nogales."

That was something to mull over, so I sat in the booth and did some mulling. Outside somewhere a siren was faint and mournful. I dialed the police station. José Manuel wasn't there, and neither was Eric Prentiss, but I left no word. I tried the paper. No. Eric wasn't in.

"Any idea where he might be?"

The girl said he might be in the café across the street. That's where he usually was at this hour. . .

He was there all right, hunched over the counter having a cup of coffee. He swung around. "Hello, Ben."

I asked: "Can I borrow your car for a while?"

"I'm going to need it after a while."

"I'll be right back," I said. "I've got to run out and see someone."

"It's in the station." He pointed toward the corner.

"Thanks." Another siren went howling by as I tore myself away.

The car was parked in the station, keys and all, and the tank was full of gas. I stepped on the starter. I put it in gear. I swung it out into the street and headed south. Back of me more sirens were screaming. Then a police car rocketed past and swung around the corner toward the Santa Cruz. I didn't follow it, though I suspected it might be a couple of fellows who wanted to see me. Before the evening was over there would be a good many people looking for me. I hoped they wouldn't wait too long. Well, no one would be lonesome. It would be sort of a family gathering, with everyone wondering what had happened to poor old Ben Logan. I put my foot on the throttle and just kept heading south.

Tony had at most a half hour's start, but Tony knew the road, and that car of hers was just about as fast as this one. Anyway, it was as fast as I wanted to drive this one. McCardle wouldn't like it if when he found me I was tangled in a barbed-wire fence, and I wouldn't like it either. I wondered if McCardle was going to be angry. Well, I'd done my best to get in touch with Madero, and I would have done my best to get in touch with the chief of police had he been less given to conclusion-jumping. Maybe I was jumping at conclusions too. Maybe that wasn't Tony who called and told me to go to Room 322. There were other women with nice husky voices.

The night was fine for thinking. The trouble was, no matter how much you thought, the more confused you became. The only certainty was death, and you had three bodies as proof of that. You could theorize all you wanted to about the rest of it. The Logan hypothesis looked sound enough, but to say it was truth was like agreeing with Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar that the universe will continue to expand for ten thousand billion years more.

The Logan theory used Mexico for its anchor: Godfrey Larch was a flyer in Mexico. He met Tony Braymer in Mexico. José Manuel Madero came from Mexico to meet that shy fellow on the plane. Juan Aruba also hailed from south of the border. Sylvan Fenchester said he was going to Guaymas to fish. Fenchester and Larch and George Popol were mixed up in some enterprise, that might or might not be a Mexican mining deal. Simple—rudimentary. Fenchester and Popol and Larch were murdered because a man who was supposed to meet them in Langton ran into the arms of the ex-mulcteer and coffin-maker from Oaxaca. A few illogical odds and ends such as Larch's body in our rented coffin, Eric's little journey to the goatherd's domain, Aruba's confession, Mrs. Aruba's state of mind, and the first reel of "The Invisible Zombie." I tried looking at the landscape. It would be fine to live in this country. A lovely woman to come home to, not to mention a twenty-five-thousand-acre ranch and scads of white-faced cattle. And maybe I should send her apologetic thought-waves for even thinking she would want the cops to find me sitting up with a corpse.

I DIDN'T need a guide to find the Ox Bow Ranch. There were no neon signs pointing the way, but north of Nogales on the right was a magnificent gate with a huge ox bow suspended from the cross-beam. A cow-hand, accustomed to wrestling with a contraption of barbed wire strung on an old cotton-wood fence-post, would have felt a little self-conscious about that gate. It opened automatically the moment you broke the beam from the electric eye. Then you were on an oiled road as smooth as waffle-batter, winding through low hills, and soon appeared the establishment of Señora Braymer, nestling in a shallow valley through which a tree-bordered stream meandered, a valley checkered with alfalfa-patches.

I pulled off the road, cut the motor and lights, and surveyed what might be my future home. It was worth sacrificing one's social security for; and should I drive in boldly, or sort of surprise her?

Someone was astir, for the lights were on, glowing softly from the windows of the rambling, low adobe house. Off to the left were the barns and some corrals and a couple of windmills. I got out of the car, and stretched, and looked at the sky. The stars were remote, shy in the presence of so much moon; and the wind was moving slowly across the hills as though thinking things over. It sought to comfort me with the faint scent of smoke. Maybe she was waiting up for me with a pot of tea and a platter of scones on the hob, and a flagon of scuppernong on the sideboard.

She was waiting up, all right, sitting alone in the long room in front of a fireplace in which a small fire was quite lost, her back to the wide windows that opened on the porch. Now here was something for a man, worn down by hard hours in the saddle, to come home to! Not your usual rough-and-ready ranch-house with a pair of deer-horns over the mantel and a couple of buffalo hides on the rough floor; not the usual ranch-woman either.

The French doors were open, so I walked in; and suddenly she was up, facing me; and there was a small gun in her hand. She wore a white shirt, and slacks that had been made from some proud Highlander's kilt.

"You," she said.

"Me," I said.

She put the gun into her pocket and smiled, but the night wind was warmer than the smile.

"I climbed down the fire-escape." Now the gun was out of sight, I felt a bit more chummy, so I moved closer.

"You what?"

"Or didn't you know there was a fire-escape?"

She put the smile away too. Her look questioned my sobriety.

"You should have told them to go up quietly," I said.

"Will you stop being obtuse and tell me what this is all about?" Wistful, almost plaintive.

"Maybe I misjudge you," I said. "You did leave word at the hotel."

"Of course I did. I didn't want you to think—"

"So maybe you didn't want the cops to find me in his room."

"Mr. Logan—"

"Let's both stop being obtuse," I said. "Let's have a drink and sit in front of the fire and talk things over."

She motioned toward a cellarette in the corner. I went over and lifted the lid, and up popped bottles and glasses.

"Ice?" Tony asked.

"Not for me." I spilled whisky into two glasses, added a touch of water, moved back to where she stood.

"We haven't a great deal of time," I said.

She dropped into her chair and tucked her feet under her. There was an ottoman in front of the chair, so I sat on that and we looked at each other. "To Sylvan!" I said and lifted my glass. "Did you kill him, or was he dead when you got there?"

Her hand was shaking, and now fear was in her eyes.

"In a very little while McCardle will be here," I said. "You were in that room, and I was in that room, so we may as well have a story ready for him."

"I didn't kill him." Frightened, more helpless than ever. The poor defenseless little child!

"You didn't even know him."

"Yes."

My glance reproved her for lying to me.

"He's my brother," Tony Braymer said.

That gave me pause. Tears welled up in her eyes, spilled across her cheeks, but she didn't break down. She didn't bury her head on my shoulder. She didn't even look at me. "I went in, and he was dead."

And what else could a poor sister do but run to a phone and call Ben Logan and tell him to hurry right over to Room 322! The most logical thing in the world.

"I didn't call the police," Tony went on. "I called you, and you weren't in, so I said for you to come to the Stockmen's right away. I was going back and wait for you." A sob stopped her. I took her cold left hand.

"Oh, Ben, Ben! Please try and understand," she sobbed.

"But you didn't go, Tony."

"I thought—" A long look into my eyes and then she got her control back and put one right across the plate. "I thought you were working with the police."

The reproachful glance, the hurt glance. "Tony!"

"You're not, are you, Ben?"

"No, Tony."

"Of course you're not. I only thought it for a little while. Then it was too late to go back to the room. I didn't know what to do. So I left word at the hotel where I was going."

"You knew I'd come?"

"I hoped you'd come."

And who was the gun for? But a man couldn't ask questions like that when she was so upset. However, there was a question to be asked: "Why was he killed?"

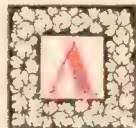
All I got was a shake of the head.

"First Popol and Larch," I said. "Then your brother. And all of them in a deal, Tony. What deal?"

"Not exactly a deal," a calm voice said. "Let's say, a cause."

I dropped Tony's hand. I dropped my drink. There, across the room, was Mr. Hale, and that thing in his hands wasn't a broom. Nor were the two men in resplendent uniforms ushers, because ushers don't tote rifles.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



AS Tony rose and faced them, one hand thrust in the slack pocket where the little gun was, the other on the back of the chair, she seemed surprised enough—surprised, angry and not a little frightened. Me, I wasn't angry. . . . Frightened? I don't know. The whole business had a weird, phony quality about it.

Perhaps it was the gun in his hand that took Mr. Hale out of the janitor class. He looked no different, really—same suit, same rumpled shirt, same tie and dusty shoes. But now he had an air about him—the air of a man who gave orders instead of taking them. Certainly his two-man army treated him with deference and respect. They were young men, both blonds with very white skin, slim, good-looking fellows in their early twenties. Their coats were powder blue, and on the left sleeve was a white object that looked a little like a turkey buzzard. Their pants were fawn-colored, their boots very black and shiny.

Mr. Hale said something in Spanish. One of the Rover Boys came over and prodded me with his rifle.

"Put up your hands, please," he said.

I put them up. He was affectionate for a moment, laying his hands on various parts of my anatomy; and then, satisfied I had come unarmed, he stepped back. He clicked his heels and bowed to Mrs. Braymer.

"Señora," he said, showing her his nice white teeth, "your hand out of the pocket, please."

The Señora brought the hand and the little gun both out of the pocket. She tossed the weapon on the chair, and he retrieved it, gave it to Mr. Hale, who put it in his pocket.

"You've met, of course," I told Tony, indicating the Empire janitor.

She didn't deny it. She looked at me and she looked at Mr. Hale, and then she let him have some choice Spanish with a high octane rating.

Mr. Hale shook his head vehemently.

"May I go?" I asked.

"Of course not," said Mr. Hale.

"I'm supposed to be here. Is that it?" The glance I gave Tony was reproachful. She took up the head-shaking where Mr. Hale had left off. Mr. Hale just grinned.

"I hate being puzzled," I said.

"Are the police ever puzzled?" asked Mr. Hale.

Now he was doing it. I didn't look like a cop; I didn't act like a cop; I had spent very little of my life around cops; yet two people in one evening were pinning badges on me. "You've got me wrong, Mr. Hale."

"I think not. Where is your friend Madero?"

"He'll be along presently," I said. At least, I hoped he would. I even hoped he would bring McCordle with him. Tony was looking at me curiously, and then her glance dropped to where my glass lay, soaking its contents into the rug. The glance moved back to me, then to the cellarette. Near the cellarette was an open window.

I picked up the glass. "Mind if I have a drink?"

"Go ahead," said Mr. Hale.

I went, and so did one of the Leatherstocking twins, his fowling-piece nuzzling my rear. "You said *cause*," I told Mr. Hale as I put whisky in the glass. "What do you mean, *cause*?"

Tony beat him to an answer. "Mexico is a democracy," Tony said. "Mr. Hale would change all that."

"Will," he corrected. "Not *would*."

"A Nazi," I said, adding water to my whisky.

"Oh, no." He seemed shocked.

"*Un Buitre Blanco*," Tony said.

"A what?" I had myself a small drink.

"A white vulture," Tony translated, her voice hard and bitter. Her glance moved from my face to the window, which was one good jump away.

I looked at my escort's sleeve. That's what it was, a turkey buzzard, a white one. My guard held out his arm so I could see the insignia better. I let him have what was in the glass right in his handsome puss, and took a half gainer through the window.

Damn the moon! Damn such a place with so little to hide behind, when three guys were trying to use you for a clay pigeon! Tony's encouraging yell gave me heart. I remembered my Army training and ran low, across the lawn, over the adobe wall; and the doctors who had said my knee was no good should have seen me. Up the road, with guns going off behind me.

If they had had sense enough to take their cars, I would never have made it. But they chose to match their legs with mine, and I was the guy who was being shot at. . . . They weren't the only ones who made mistakes, however. Just as I reached the station-wagon, I looked back, and someone rose up behind me and clouted me with a rifle-butt. I ducked, caught the blow on my shoulder, and turning, saw another member of Roy Rodgers' rangers. I grappled with him, buried my head in his chest and bit him. Down we went, me trying to remember how Hank Levy would do it, rolling around in the dry grass. Another good bite, and I was up and diving for the car. He caught my foot, and we played tug of war, me hanging onto the car, he hanging on to my foot. That was when the reinforcements arrived. . . .

When I came to, I was stretched out in the cabin of a plane, and Tony was beside me, stroking my head.

I was a beautiful morning, cool and clear, and the air had bite to it. Outside my window was a courtyard; across the yard was a high adobe wall, and beyond the wall the hill swept up toward the pale sky. On the hilltop was a big rock that vaguely resembled a robed figure. The rock leaned forward a bit, and that made the figure seem to be running away. Last night I hadn't seen the rock. Last night I hadn't seen much of anything, be-

cause the moon was gone when one of the Rover Boys put the plane down in a hayfield. A car had been waiting for us. Tony and I had been shoved into the back seat of the car and driven along a rutted road to a big gate, and the gate had swung open and we had been taken into a gloomy building and along a dark hallway to our rooms. Mr. Hale hadn't come with us. Mr. Hale had stayed at the hayfield, talking to some guy.

NOT far from my window a young man sat on his haunches smoking a cigarette, and there was a rifle lying beside him. He wore that same pretty uniform. Seeing me, he grinned.

I exhausted most of my Spanish. "*Buenas dias*," I said.

"Hello," said the youth.

"You speak English?"

"Sure." He rose, picked up his gun and came over to the window.

"Where am I?"

"Right here," said the youth, grinning. "Chihuahua."

"But where?"

He motioned toward the hill. "Over there is Sonora. That is the Hill of the Terrified Monk."

Maybe I should have hung around until Madero told me the legend. Or did he think I knew the legend? I said: "How far from Nogales?"

"Three hundred—maybe four hundred miles. Not far."

"This Mr. Hale's place?"

"Mr. Hale?"

"Peter Hale," I said. "The guy who brought me here."

"Oh, him," said the youth. "That's not his name. You mean Don Pedro."

"Do I?"

"Don Pedro Ygnacio Luis de Morelos y Ocampo," said the youth. He had a white vulture on his arm too, a nice clean one. He spoke with a very faint accent.

"Suppose we just call him Don Pedro," I said. He must be an illustrious fellow to have a name like that, much too illustrious to keep around to chase the Empire rats. Why, the very idea—the man who swept up the peanutshells and cleaned the chewing-gum off the chairs had a name with eight words in it!

"All right."

"He sounds important."

"He is. Very important. His brother was important. His mother was important. His father was General Joaquin Luis Martinez de Chihuahua."

"Tell me more," I said.

"He's our leader. That's all there is to tell."

"How about the General?" I said. "How come he isn't the leader?"

"Pancho Villa shot him," replied the youth casually.

"Why?"

He shrugged. "Who knows? Pancho Villa shot a great many generals."

"Are they going to shoot me?"

Another shrug. "Perhaps."

"I'd like breakfast first."

The youth glanced at his watch. It was eight forty-five. "In a little while they will come."

I thanked him for the information. He went back to his spot of ground and sat down again, and I filled a basin with water and had a sketchy bath. I had just dressed when someone knocked.

"Come in," I called.

The door opened. A little man with a very white mustache put his head in, smiled and beckoned. I followed him along the hall and through a heavy door, and then I was in a patio. A table was set up in the patio; and Mr. Hale, or rather Don Pedro Ygnacio Luis de Morelos y Ocampo, was sitting at the table. You couldn't call him Mr. Hale. Not in that get-up! His old father would have been proud of him. The same color scheme as the

Rover Boys' uniforms, but more gold braid, stars on the collar and medals on the chest, and a pistol in a shiny black holster.

"Good morning," he said, and motioned to a chair. The table was set for two. He interpreted my glance. "Mrs. Braymer is having breakfast in her room."

I looked around me. The patio gave into a garden, almost tropical in its lushness, grass and flowers and orange trees and, out of place there by the thick, high wall, three organ cactus growing. The house was a rambling adobe.

"Like it?" he asked.

"Not bad," I said. "Yours?"

"Now. It was my uncle's. You know what happened to him."

I didn't. I said I didn't.

"Doesn't Madero take the police into his confidence?"

I salted a tortilla and tried the *café con leche*. "You've got the wrong man, Mr. Hale."

"Don Pedro," he corrected. "Madero is a fool, anyway. There I was, the man he was looking for, and he didn't recognize me."

"What did you kill them for?" I asked.

He frowned. "Me? I didn't kill them. You know better than that."

"I don't know anything. Who did, then?"

He shrugged. "Maybe Madero."

"Maybe not Madero," I said.

"Maybe you?" His smile was nice and bright.

"Why me?"

"Because they were part of my organization, of course."

So he thought Madero didn't know who he was? Maybe Madero didn't. But one thing he did know, and that was where the Hill of the Terrified Monk was. "I didn't do it," I said. "If that's why you brought me here, you can take me right home."

"You're here for another reason."

That was something, anyway. "Why, then?"

"I need information."

"Such as—"

"The steps Madero and your people plan to take."

"Tell me about yourself first," I said. "I don't like to discuss steps during breakfast."

"You don't know about me?"

"The guard told me your name. That's all I know."

"The others—the two who were with Madero in the House of the Beautiful Girls—do they know?"

"I didn't ask."

"Are you familiar with Mexican history?"

"I saw 'Viva Villa' and 'Juarez,'" I said. "That's all the history I know."

He looked hurt, then set out to put my mind right, only I think his viewpoint was a trifle warped. Diaz had been Mexico's greatest figure, unless you went back to Cortez, which Don Pedro's family did. An ancestor had come to Mexico with Cortez. From then on, all the limbs of the family tree had been important, especially Don Pedro's father, who was buried down the line a couple of hundred miles, God rest his soul! Then there was Don Pedro's brother, Don Esteban.

"Dead," said Don Pedro sadly. "They shot him." And for such a trifling reason. A bit of trouble over an attack on a train in 1927. One hundred and twenty-odd passengers got themselves killed in the attack, and now Don Esteban shared a grave with half a dozen of his followers in a corn-patch near Durango, and some day Don Pedro was going to dig him up and put him in the family plot where he belonged.

"I have been away," he explained, "in Spain. Ten years in Spain and a year in Germany. There was no chance to bring my brother home."

"What were you doing in Langton?"

"You know what I was doing."

"But why?"

"Waiting," Don Pedro smiled. "For two years, waiting. It had to be, because of what happened to my uncle."

I regarded him with grave interest.

"You don't know?"

I shook my head.

"He died in prison." Don Pedro wasn't smiling, and his voice was deadly. "Madero put him in prison two years ago."

A busy guy, that Madero. "Why?" I asked.

"He disagreed with Cardenas," said Don Pedro. "He and many others disagreed, so they were put in prison. Like cattle!" He hit the table with the flat of his hand. "My uncle hanged himself. To me he left all this."

I had another look at the garden and the part of the hacienda I could see. Not a bad heritage.

"He left me more," said Don Pedro. "His work."

"Yes?"

Don Pedro rose. "Come with me."

I came. We went through the garden and along a walk. A flight of stairs led up to the tower, and we climbed the stairs. Two men in uniform were in the tower, sitting on the floor by a machine-gun playing cards. They got up and saluted. Don Pedro ignored them, and they left the cards where they were, and began fiddling with the gun. It was a new one.

From one side of the tower you looked into a valley, a checkerboard of trim green fields. Up yonder was the hayfield where we had landed, and by the field were two big haystacks. But no place for the plane. No building anywhere big enough for that plane. From the other side you looked into the courtyard. Beyond the house, at the back near the wall, were several small adobe huts, and men in uniform lounged outside the huts. Near them several children were playing. All along the wall there were parapets, and there were men and machine-guns in the parapets.

Don Pedro motioned to the valley. "All that is left," he said. He sighed, waved at the horizon. "As far as you can see, my uncle owned. Beyond that was my father's land. They took it away. Divided it up. Gave it to the peons."

High-handed of them, certainly. I took another look at the valley. Me, I wouldn't have minded owning just that much.

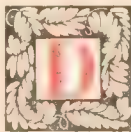
"We'll get it back," he said. "All of it."

In front of us was the fertile valley. On our right was a range of hills. On our left another hill, crowned by a stone that looked like a robed figure: the Terrified Monk. "Every acre of it," he said. "Every tree and stone! My father's land and my uncle's land. And the land that was stolen from other men and from their fathers."

"That's fine," I said.

Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut. Apparently he had forgotten all about me for the moment. He turned, scowled and said: "Now you're going to do some talking."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



ON PEDRO'S study was a corner room, big and cool, with a tile floor and heavy ornate furniture. On one wall was a map of Mexico with a number of red-headed pins stuck in it, most of them in the western area. Through the small windows you could see the garden and the courtyard beyond, where some kids were playing on the hard-packed earth, all very quiet and peaceful and friendly. My session with the ex-janitor and a couple of his henchmen, slim, light-haired dandies completely lacking in inferiority complexes, was anything but quiet and friendly. And that gorgeous fellow across the desk was the guy I'd dispatched for sandwiches and milk not forty-eight hours ago!

It was no use arguing with Don Pedro. His mind was made up, and nothing I could say would change it. I was a Government man, placed in the Fenchester office to do a bit of spying. Hadn't I been at the airport with Madero? Hadn't I sat next to Madero at the Prentiss party? Hadn't I been closeted with Madero and McCardle on several occasions? Come on, talk and talk fast if you know what's good for you: how much does Madero know, what's his next step, and how would you like your teeth kicked in? Eventually one of the dandies caressed the side of my head with the back of his hand.

"Pepito," snapped Don Pedro. "Wait."

Pepito rubbed his knuckles and grinned evilly. He made a few remarks in Spanish, and from his tone I gathered he thought it was time to get down to business.

"Pepito is hotheaded," Don Pedro apologized. "His father was once very wealthy. As wealthy as my father. He is filled with resentment."

"I didn't take his father's land," I said.

"Of course you didn't," replied Don Pedro.

"And will you boys get it through your heads I'm not a cop," I suggested.

"Why be stupid?" Don Pedro pointed out.

I shrugged. "If I knew anything, I'd be more than willing to talk," I said, keeping an eye on Pepito and his pal, getting myself all set to duck. "I went to work for Fenchester because I needed a job. I came to Langton because he told me to."

It was no use. Why did I do this, why did I do that? But mostly, why did I go to the Ox Bow ranch? Had they taken a good look at Tony Braymer? Wasn't that reason enough?

That question got me three unbelieving, supercilious looks. Don Pedro sighed, stood up, said sorrowfully: "I'm very sorry, Mr. Logan."

"You leaving?"

"Yes."

"Good-by," I said. He closed the door behind him.

"Now!" said Pepito.

They didn't dip me in honey and tie me on an anthill. They didn't put matches under my toenails and set them alight. They didn't wrap me in a green cowhide and leave me in the sun. Nothing imaginative about those boys; but their methods would have been effective had I any secrets inside me. Pepito's playmate called himself Bonifacio O'Donoju, and Notre Dame could have used him to kick the point after touchdown.

AT first I tried mixing it with them. It didn't work: Pepito held me, and Bonifacio kicked goal. Then I put on a limp act, on the theory that they were gentlemen and would hesitate to hit a man when he was down—but they had no scruples. Such names to call a man, even the Spanish ones, shocked me. After a while the names, the questions, the kicks didn't mean anything. Then I was on my bed seeing the room through a red haze, and there was something cool on my forehead. The world came back into focus, and I saw Tony sitting beside me, looking terribly sad.

She went over to the dresser, came back again at once. She had a glass of brandy. "Drink this."

I drank it. I put my hand up and found a cloth on my head, so I wiped my face gingerly and sat up. Tony looked pale and frightened, but she was all in one piece. "They haven't got around to you yet," I said.

"He talked to me. He didn't hurt me."

"Wait until Pepito and Bonifacio interview you."

"Beasts."

"I know better words," I said.

She squeezed my hand and found a tragic little smile. "What are we going to do, Ben?"

"I don't know about you. I haven't much choice."

"You think—"

"The guy's crazy," I said. "He's got the idea he's the spirit of Pancho Villa in reverse."

She shook her head. "No. He isn't crazy."

"Whose side are you on?"

Anger flared in her eyes. "I've always hated them. But —until— Oh, what could I do?"

"You been working with them?"

"No. But they've used the ranch, and I had to shut my eyes. Because of Sylvan."

"Suppose you begin at the beginning," I suggested.

SHE was standing by the bed. Now she sat on the edge and held my hand, while she smoothed my forehead lightly with her fingertips, and her eyes were warm, tender, blurred with tears. At first she hadn't known what it was all about. Sylvan suddenly acquired a plane and started using her little landing-field; and because it wasn't big enough, she enlarged it. Then he brought Godfrey Larch and Popol down. She had known Godfrey in Mexico, and that's where Sylvan had known him, and it was Godfrey who got Sylvan mixed up in it all. Sylvan had had a lot of property in Mexico, and the Government had taken it, and Sylvan wanted to get it back. One night Sylvan and Godfrey flew to the ranch, and Don Pedro was with them.

"I overheard them talking," Tony said. "I didn't know what they were planning, but I knew it was wrong. I told Sylvan not to come to the ranch any more. He said I was in it too, and I couldn't back out. He was right. I couldn't." She put her head on my shoulder and cried a little while I stroked her hair.

"Just what are they up to?" I asked after a while.

"Don't you know?" She sat up and stared at me.

"I told you all I could figure out was that he's nuts."

"I didn't know, really, until last night," Tony said.

"When I got to the ranch, he was there with his men. He was telling me about it when we heard your car coming."

"You didn't know he was there when you left word for me?"

"Oh, Ben!"

"Sorry, Tony."

"I don't blame you," Tony said. Her fingers were very cool and very soft. "Poor, dear Ben!"

"Do I look awful?"

"Your poor face."

"My poor everything," I admitted. "What did he tell you?"

"They're starting a revolution," Tony said. "He isn't the only one, Ben. He's the leader. There are hundreds of them all through Mexico. *Haciendados*—landowners—whose estates have been taken by the Government and given to the peons. Old army men, thrown out by Cardenas and Comacho. And then there are the Germans, and people of German and Italian descent."

"I still say he's nuts."

"You don't know Mexico, Ben."

"Who put up the money? It takes dough to run this sort of a show. Guns. Uniforms—"

"Germany, I think. That's where"—her look was tragic—"Sylvan and Popol came in. Popol—I'm not sure—but I think Popol was getting money from Germany. Don Pedro came to Popol, and Popol got Sylvan into it. Promised Sylvan they would get back his property for him. They gave Sylvan the money, and he bought the plane, and he got the guns and flew them in here."

"Where did he get guns?" Even if I hadn't taken a couple of good ones on the Adam's apple, I'd have had a hard time swallowing this.

"I don't know, Ben. I don't think they came from the United States, though. They were probably left somewhere on the coast—it's a very lonely coast. Maybe in Lower California. You see, this all started before we got into the war."

I gave her a good sharp look. "And you didn't know what was going on?"

She put her face in her hands. "No, Ben. Please believe me. I knew something was wrong. But not how wrong."

It was fantastic, all right. But out there in the courtyard there were men in bright uniforms with white vultures on their arms, and there were machine-guns on the wall and in the tower—new guns. And there was Don Pedro and his blond boys. As far as Mexico went, I wasn't worried. Mexico would do all right. Some shooting, some guys killed; and then it would be all over. Germany wouldn't even get her money's worth out of it. But how about Ben Logan? There was something to think about. Any way you looked at it, I was in a delicate position, and so was Tony.

I asked: "Who killed Popol and Larch and Fenchester, Tony?"

Her eyes were green until she moved her head, and then the pupils darkened and were almost black. "I don't know," she said.

"Is Aruba mixed up in this?"

Her voice was faint. "I don't know. No one ever mentioned him."

Her fingertips touched my lips as though to stop the flow of questions. Her eyes pleaded with me to forget about death. I ignored the plea. "Aruba told the police he killed Popol and Larch. Why did he tell them that?"

"How do you know?"

"Eric Prentiss," I said. "Eric heard him confess."

Her hand left my face. She pushed her hair back. "Then—but he couldn't have killed Sylvan—"

"No. And he didn't kill Popol or Larch. So why did he confess?"

She seemed utterly bewildered, utterly at sea. "I can't think any more."

"He was shielding someone, Tony. Who?"

Her sigh was almost a sob. She dug at her eyes with her knuckles, and looked more than ever like a puzzled, frightened child. "Don't talk any more."

"Was he shielding you, Tony?"

"Stop it," she cried. "Oh, stop it! I've told you all I know." Her arms circled my shoulders; she cradled my head against her soft breast and held me. "Don't. Don't."

"All right, Tony."

"What are we going to do?" She didn't wait for an answer. Her lips were on mine, soft and warm, and I stopped thinking about murder and about Don Pedro and his white vultures. The roar of a plane brought us back to earth. She sat up.

"Listen."

"The boys are taking a trip," I suggested.

"No. Listen. That's not Sylvan's plane. It's a bigger one. Come over here—"

WE went to the window, stood with our arms about each other, listening to the roar of the plane. It was right overhead, and it seemed to be circling. Out in the courtyard only the children were visible. They stood with their faces lifted to the sky, shielding their eyes with their grubby little hands.

"Go out and take a look," I said. "I can't. They'd probably kick what's left of my teeth out. Maybe they'll let you."

"I'll try." She dropped a kiss on my cheek and was gone.

I waited at the window, watching the kids there in the bright sunlight, but I wasn't thinking of the kids. I was thinking of Tony and Tony's weird story. I wanted so very much to trust her. It could be, my heart kept saying. Nothing was impossible now, and Sylvan was her brother and hell, you couldn't turn your brother in! But little doubts, like needles, kept jabbing themselves into my mind.

... To hell with it! That plane circling over was the thing to think about. And speaking of planes, where did Don Pedro keep the one we came in on last night?

I heard the door open. I turned. Tony slipped inside, her eyes bright, her face alight. "It's a Mexican Army plane," she whispered. "I got into the yard before they stopped me, and saw it. A big one. Four motors. Oh, Ben, they know, they know!"

She clung to me, and we took comfort from the roar of those motors, and then they faded to a faint drone and the courtyard came to life.

ONE of the guards came and ordered Tony back to her room. A wizened man brought a tray of food and put it on the dresser, then locked the door as he went out. Outside my window now was another dapper youngster squatting on his heels, affectionately holding a shiny rifle. I ate a little, then slept; and when I woke up, the day was fading. There was a good deal of commotion in the yard—orders being shouted, the rattle of equipment. Evidently the boys were getting set for trouble. I hoped whatever was happening would make them forget about me. I pulled a chair over to the window and sat in the half darkness waiting and thinking, and after a while things began falling into place. Not all the pieces were there, but there were enough. . . .

Someone was fumbling with the door. I turned. Don Pedro stood there smiling at me.

"Good evening," Don Pedro said. "Pepito and Bonifacio say you were very stubborn."

"A couple of nice boys."

"Competent," said Don Pedro. He sat on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. "Madero knows about the hacienda on the Hill of the Terrified Monk."

"Evidently."

"You knew too."

"I heard the name," I said. "I was told there was a legend. Madero was going to tell me the legend when he had time."

"La Loma del Fraile Espantado," Don Pedro mused. "A foolish tale. I forget most of it. There was a monk a long time ago—two hundred, three hundred years. They say he built this place. They say he was afraid and came here to hide from God. I never believed it. Are you hungry?"

"Not very. What happened to him?"

"He was turned to stone." He motioned toward the hilltop. "Very silly, isn't it? Mexico is full of silly legends. Have you decided to talk?"

"You expect an invasion?"

"Perhaps. Suppose we remain on the subject."

"Suppose I tell you what I know? Do you knock me off?"

"Of course not." His smile was charming. It begged me to trust him.

"I don't know a hell of a lot," I said. "I've only been on the case a few months. But the way I see it, you're being taken for a sucker."

He regarded me thoughtfully, a trace of the smile remaining. Not a pleasant thing, that smile, though.

"Madero knows all about you and your boys and he isn't worried at all."

"No?"

"Not about you."

"Who then?"

"There you have me," I said. "I'll be damned if I know."

"Madero—he knew about me at the theater?"

"All the time. But he's after someone bigger—"

That didn't go down well. The veins in his forehead stood out, and I thought for a minute he was going to lug out that gun and let me have it. Someone bigger—the very idea!

"Bigger in a different way," I said. "More dangerous to Mexico."

His dark eyes glittered at me angrily. His hand was too damn' close to that gun-butt.

"You are a Mexican," I went on hurriedly. "Your views on government differ, perhaps. But this is your country and you love it. With you as its head, it would still be Mexico."

Not a peep out of him, but he didn't look quite so mean. "Madero knows this will straighten itself out one way or the other. So do my people. Who put up the money for you, Don Pedro? That's who we're afraid of."

A long sigh hissed past his closed lips.

"Not you or George Popol or Sylvan Fenchester, but the one behind them."

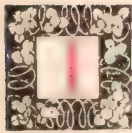
"Who?"

"You yanked me before I could find out," I said. "But I can guess." He waited for me to start guessing. "Aruba."

Not a flicker of expression on his face now. Perhaps he was not all aristocrat. Perhaps way back in the family tree there was an Aztec or a Yaqui or a Mayan or a Zapotec. He stood up.

"We will eat now," he said.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



I came after dinner, suddenly and somewhat unexpectedly. We were having coffee in the patio, a chummy little group, Don Pedro, Tony, Carlos de Pereira, our blond pilot and I, with the light from the moon flooding the garden. Not a merry group, this one. Carlos had spent his time saying nice things about Tony. She had been thoughtful; I had been wary; and Don Pedro had brooded. Now with the arrival of the moon he made a few remarks about stars. Then faintly in the northwest a motor roared.

It wasn't the same plane this time. It was a P-38, and it slid down over the hill close enough to whisper into the ear of that lonely rock, then across the hacienda toward the south. A moment later it was back, and it looked for a bit as though the pilot was going to have coffee with us. Something white flashed from the plane, smacked the hard earth in the courtyard, and the plane climbed steeply. . . . A voice cried out in Spanish. Don Pedro and Carlos were on their feet, shouting in reply; then Carlos was across the yard to where a couple of the boys were inspecting the object that had dropped.

Tony's hand sought mine under the table. "They wanted to fire at the plane," she whispered. "He told them to wait."

Carlos came back with a bit of paper in his hand, saluted, gave it to Don Pedro.

"They know," Carlos said. He struck a match and touched the flame to the candle on the table. The other held the note close to the flame, read it, crumpled it angrily and tossed it away.

"Inside!" Don Pedro snapped. "Both of you!"

We stood up. "Going to fight it out?" I asked.

"Naturally," he answered, with an impatient gesture. "Go on. Hurry. —Carlos, lock them in their rooms."

Tony caught my hand in the dark corridor and pressed it against her breast.

"Keep your fingers crossed," I said.

"Oh, Ben!"

"Please," said Carlos. My door slammed behind me and the key turned. I heard their footsteps going away.

My pal was outside the window leaning on his rifle. He flashed a look back, then turned his face again to the sky. Men were hurrying across the courtyard, and up on the walls they were shouting back and forth, quite gay about the whole business. Off to the left a man laughed softly.

A half-hour passed. Then again came the roar of a plane. I couldn't see it, but I judged from the sound that it was the same one. It came in higher, and every machine-gun in the place went into action. My boy swung his rifle up and started waving the muzzle of it around, but he held his fire. The plane slid off into the wind, and the firing stopped. Well, if that note was a request to surrender, Madero had his answer now, and we could expect action. I called softly: "Señor."

My guard swung around.

"Cigarette," I said.

"Si," the guard said, and came over to the window. He was a nice-looking fellow with an eager smile, and I hated to do it. The brandy bottle caught him back of the ear, and down he went without a groan. I dropped down beside him, heaved him up and into the room, then followed. He was neatly bound and gagged and reposing in the closet when the plane came back and raked the hacienda from stem to stern with all its fire-power. Maybe my friend was lucky, at that. I stood at the window watching the fireworks. Plenty of guns around, from the racket outside. A man cried out, then another and another, and I wondered how Don Pedro felt about it, and hoped one of the wounded was Pepito or Bonifacio.

Five times more that plane swept down and across the hacienda, raking the house and the walls, and each time the moaning chorus grew. But the lads kept peppering away at the streak of lightning that roared over to climb and roar right back again. Don Pedro wasn't giving up easily. . . . In the closet, my guard moaned faintly.

It didn't come back again. The firing stopped; the moans of the wounded faded; and men with stretchers moved back and forth across the yard, carrying the casualties into the house. I caught a glimpse of Don Pedro walking beside one of the stretchers, and guessed that someone he valued had stopped a couple. . . .

Slowly the moon spun higher, spilling light on the barren hills, and my eyes ached from staring at the sky, watching for those specks of light to come shooting toward us like stars, listening for the clatter of those welcome guns.

An hour passed. A yell brought me to my feet. An answering yell, then a couple of rifle-shots. Above, in the tower, the machine-gun went into action. I dropped through the window, picked up the rifle and crept around the house toward the stairs.

This time they came by land. Halfway up that stairway leading to the tower I saw them, men on foot and on horseback on the far slope across the little valley. A dark shape hurtled toward the hacienda along the twisting road, and over my head that gun sent bits of steel to meet it. It was a car, and whoever was driving it didn't seem to give a damn, and you were pretty sure the thing was armored. It shot past, guns blazing, and headed up the road toward the hayfield. Quietly I went upstairs. There were two men in the tower, and both of them were busy with the gun, too busy to look around. I crouched against the wall, my guard's rifle ready; and when the car swung around and headed back and the tower gun started up again, I shot them both.

Right above my head bullets smacked into the adobe as the car let us have a few more bursts before it rejoined the boys across the way. Well, here I was, and here was the gun, and what to do about it? I rolled its owners out of the way, swung its nose lower, and when action was resumed started spraying the walls. Maybe I didn't do any damage, but I got a good deal of satisfaction out of swinging the gun around and peppering away. It was fine until the damned thing jammed. There I was fiddling with it, and guys on both sides were trying to distract my attention so could I help it if I wasn't aware of Don Pedro, until he was there in the tower with me, holding a sub-machine gun.

"You ——" Don Pedro said.

I looked at him. The rifle was on the floor. The machine-gun wouldn't work. Well, this was it. So I squatted there and waited.

"Come!" He motioned to the stairs.

I didn't move. There was no sense to it, and anyway, my legs were weak.

"Hurry," he snapped. "Get down those stairs."

I got, willingly enough, thankful for at least a few moments more of life. It had suddenly become a tremendously precious thing. All along the wall there was the steady rattle of shots, and now from across the valley came heavy explosions, and shells started screaming over. He was right behind me, the gun jammed in my back. Then we were in the house, going down a dim hallway, and then we were in the dark kitchen and through a heavy door and down a stone stairway. The murmur of voices came up to meet us, and we walked into a damp, cold cellar in which a few flickering candles tried to dispel the gloom. Nine wounded men were stretched out on the floor, and half a dozen women were ministering to them. Over in the corner huddled the children, big-eyed and silent. Pepito was standing there with Tony, and her dark eyes were full of fear.

"Ben!" Tony whispered.

"Shut up," Don Pedro said. The gun nudged me. "You can fly?"

"Where's Carlos?" I looked among the wounded for him. Bonifacio was there, and Bonifacio wasn't doing so well, but no Carlos.

"Dead," Don Pedro snapped. "Can you fly?"

"Yes," I said.

He nodded at Pepito. "How long can you hold them?"

A cigarette drooped from Pepito's lower lip, and I didn't like the way he looked at me. "Two, three hours," he said with a shrug.

Don Pedro said something in Spanish. Pepito shrugged again, flipped his cigarette at the wall. He took a flashlight from his pocket and handed it to Tony.

"Adios," said Don Pedro.

The other acknowledged the farewell with a casual salute, turned and went upstairs.

The gun's nose nudged me. Don Pedro nodded toward an oaken door at the far side of the room, motioned to Tony. She pulled it open, snapped on the light, and then we were in a wine-cellar. On either side were racks of dusty bottles, and farther on were huge kegs, filling the rock-hewn room with the heavy musty scent of wine. Another door, hidden behind a tremendous cask, the planks moss-covered, and then a dank passageway into the hill, a narrow tunnel in the rock, the roof so low I had to stoop a little. In the old days the boys thought of everything; but then, labor must have been cheap.

Water dripping from the stone caught the flashlight's beam and threw it back at us as we moved ahead, strung out like Indians, not speaking, our footsteps echoing hollowly all around.

ON that long dismal walk through the escape tunnel that Don Pedro's ancestors—or else the terrified monk—had had hewn into the hill centuries ago, I did a lot of thinking. Mostly I was concerned with what was going to happen to me unless I started pulling rabbits out of hats. There wasn't much question about it. I was along to take Don Pedro for a ride because there was no one else on hand to do it; and when the trip was over he would settle the score in his whimsical fashion. And how about Tony? Ahead of me her slim form moved, the light dancing on before her. She could handle the ship after a fashion. Maybe Don Pedro figured that once I got it into the air, she could take over and he could kick me overboard. A pleasant thought.

The air grew fresher, almost warm, and then we were in a low, square room with beams supporting the ceiling.

The shaft of light found a door and Don Pedro's voice ordered: "Switch off the light and open the door."

I stepped forward, pulled, felt it swing inward; and then far off I heard the rattle of shots and the intermittent barking of the big gun. A clump of brush masked the tunnel exit. We pushed past it and stood in moonlight just above the hayfield, close to the two big haystacks. Across the valley and down, the guns stabbed at the pale night.

"Hurry," Don Pedro said. "The second haystack."

WE moved down through rocks and brush to level ground, and when we neared the great pile of hay, a voice challenged us in Spanish.

"*Estéban?*" Don Pedro asked.

"*Si, Don Pedro.*" A figure emerged from the shadow of the stack, and a rifle-barrel flashed in the moonlight.

So this was the hangar, a good one, a shed of galvanized steel with tons of hay piled on it. The entrance was covered with a curtain of sacking on which straw had been sewn so cleverly that it seemed the end of the haystack. Inside was the big single-motored plane, and another Mexican was standing in front of the prop.

Don Pedro asked some questions. The two guys must have given him the answers he wanted, because he gestured toward the curtain, and the fellow with the gun grabbed a rope, and the makeshift door rolled itself up as neatly as the curtain in the old Mason opera house in Los Angeles. Ahead of us the moon-drenched field stretched, moderately smooth for a hayfield, but we weren't here to pitch hay, and that piece of machinery there wasn't a mower. Tony was close to me now, her fingers digging into my arms, but she didn't speak.

"Can you?" Don Pedro asked.

"I can try," I said.

"Carlos had no trouble."

"Did he try taking up a cold ship at night?"

"Sure."

"Roll her out," I said.

He shook his head. "No. We start her inside. Get in."

I got in and held out my hand to Tony. "Strap yourself tight," I told her. "This may be a bit rough."

"Yes, Ben."

"Scared?"

"Not of this."

Don Pedro stayed with his pals for a moment, giving them last-minute instructions. Tony tilted her face toward me. "Kiss me, Ben darling."

She clung to me, trembling a little, her eyes closed. I kissed her, pushed her down and strapped her in. "We'll make it all right," I said.

"And then?"

I shrugged and went forward. Behind me the door was slammed shut, and Don Pedro came up lugging his tommy-gun and dropped into the co-pilot's seat. The prop spun; the motor took hold, and I gunned it. For the first time since I had met him, Don Pedro looked nervous. I hoped he would keep his hands away from the trigger of that gun, because it was pointed right at my stomach.

"Here we go," I said.

The field wasn't too bad. Up at the end I swung her around, and then I could see the hacienda and the far hill where Madero's boys were, and now because you couldn't hear the guns, it was all very peaceful and beautiful.

The field came at us with a rush; we hit a few bumps and then we were up, roaring toward the hacienda; and then we were over it.

"Now where?" I asked.

Don Pedro unbuckled his belt. "Fly low over them," he said, holding the gun fondly. The frightened look was gone.

I stood up. "I'm not playing games with a cold motor. If you want to, go ahead."

"Sit down." Don Pedro made little circles in the air with the gun's nose.

"This is silly," I said. "I'm practically indispensable." Nuts, I had said. Now I was sure of it. There was a glint in his eye I didn't like, and maybe the so-and-so knew enough to keep her in the air.

"Down."

I sat. "Don't let me hear any complaints when they haul us out."

His laugh was high-pitched, like a girl's silly giggle. I banked her easily; and far below us was the hill, and there were tiny flashes of light, like fireflies down there. There was a window to the right of him, and it was obvious what he hoped to do: Kick the window out, then as we nosed down, let them have it. Not at all practical, and highly ineffectual, but maybe the satisfaction he was going to get out of it was worth the try. The trouble was, he forgot about Tony. I felt, rather than saw her standing in the passageway; then something flashed past my ear, and Don Pedro grunted and went down. Tony clipped him again with what was left of the big flashlight, then grabbed the gun.

"Look out!" Tony cried.

That's what happens when you let things distract you. There was the hill right in front of us, very big and very solid, and much more impressive than the eucalyptus tree that ended my career with the armed forces. I held my breath and yanked the nose up and said a couple of small prayers....

"Made it," Tony said.

I headed for the moon and tried to seem matter-of-fact about the whole business, but I didn't do any talking for a couple of minutes. I wondered if our friends down below were very disappointed.

"Another twenty feet," Tony said. What did she mean, twenty?

I stood up. "If you can handle her, I'll take care of the chief," I said.

She nodded, slipped under the wheel. Don Pedro was groaning and trying to lift himself up on his hands. I dragged him out, banged his head on the floor a few times, and he was quiet again. He stayed quiet until I had him wound up in some seat-straps and stretched out in the baggage compartment; then he came to, long enough to curse me, so I locked him in and went forward. We were still climbing.

"Am I doing all right?" Tony asked.

"You're doing fine. Ever fly her before?"

She shook her head.

"Want me to take over?"

"Please."

We changed places. I leveled off, saw we were headed north and started to swing around.

"Ben!" Tony put her hand on my arm.

"We can make it," I said. "Don't worry. I know the field now."

"It isn't that."

"We can't stay up here all night," I said.

"Ben, listen."

"We have the gun. If those two guys are still there, we'll take them."

"No. North, Ben. Please, please!"

I looked at her. Her eyes had desperation in them. She clamped both hands on my arm and shook it.

"They'll arrest me," she said, and the words were mixed with sobs. "Madero will. He needn't know. Take me back—to the ranch. No one will know, no one. You can tell them—you can say I wasn't there."

"They'll find out."

"No."

"He was your brother. Madero will understand."

"Do you love me?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. We can be so happy. I'll wait, and when you come back, we can go away. They won't know. You can say you went to the ranch looking for me, and I wasn't there. Only he was there, and he made you go with him."

Such a beautiful ranch, with a creek running through it. Such fine white-faced cattle, and no man could complain with Tony sitting across the table at breakfast.

"I'll drive to Phoenix," Tony said, hurrying the words out. "I know some people there, and they'll say I was with them all the time. I'll tell Madero the truth, Ben. That I didn't know anything about it. And I didn't, really, until tonight." She let my arm go, wrapped both arms around my neck, and buried her face in my hair. Her slim body was trembling.

"They'll be watching for this plane at the border," I said.

Her answer was a whisper. "The oxygen-masks. We could put them on, and fly very high. That's what Sylvan did."

"P-38's can go higher. Not a chance to get across."

She lifted her face. "Ben."

"Yes, Tony."

"I remember—Sylvan said there was a field in Lower California. Maybe we could find it."

"And then what?"

"I love you so very much. I'm afraid,"—she waited for a moment to tell me what of,—"*afraid they won't believe me and—and—I'd lose you.*"

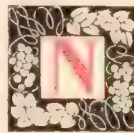
"I'm afraid too," I said.

"Are you, Ben?" No tears now, and a whole lot of hope.

"I don't think they'll believe you either," I said, buckling my safety-belt. "I don't, so why should Madero?"

I wasn't quick enough. She had her hands on the gun and was swinging it up, so what could I do but go into a dive. My right hand hit her as we roared down, flung her forward. When I pulled out, she was curled up beside the gun, and there was a nasty cut on her forehead. I lit a cigarette and looked at her lying there so small and lovely and harmless, and wondered if Far Western Theaters was going to stay in business. Oh, well, ranch-life could be boring too, and I never was much of a hand with a horse.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



ONE o'clock Saturday morning, and here I was just getting out of bed three hundred odd miles south of Langton, when I should have been bustling around the Empire Theater making last-minute preparations for the big event. Or maybe it had been canceled now that the president of Far Western Theaters was in the Langton morgue, and the janitor was down in the cellar of what was left of his hacienda, suffering from a mild concussion and probably utterly dispirited because his revolution was a bust.

Outside my window there was a man with a gun, but the uniform he wore was the drab, practical one handed out by the quartermaster corps of the Mexican Army. There were some shell-holes in the courtyard, and part of the wall was gone. Through one breach I could see the Hill climbing skyward; and up on the slope, near the lonely rock, some men were busily attacking the earth with picks and shovels, while other men stood around leaning on their rifles and smoking.

A fine bright cool day, a day for dancing in the streets and strewing rose-petals; but it did nothing for my spirits. I was lower than an exhibitor with a re-issue of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on his hands. Nobody trusted me. Nobody appreciated my true worth; and that guy outside the window wasn't walking up and down for his health. It had been bad enough having our ex-janitor take me for a cop, but this was intolerable—risking my neck for them, and being treated like a White Culture!

I bathed as best I could in the wash-basin on the stand near the dresser. I dressed and wondered how a man went about getting a cup of coffee in this hotel. . . . Someone knocked. I told him to come in. A key turned in the door, it opened and there was a youthful soldier giving me a salute. I saluted back.

"Come in," I said.

He came in, grinning. "I speak English."

"So do I," I said.

"Do you know Boyle Heights in Los Angeles?" the youth asked. "I went to school in Boyle Heights."

"That's interesting," I said. "When do they shoot me?"

"They don't shoot you." He accompanied the news with a vigorous shake of his head.

That was something, anyway.

"Mr. Madero wants you," he said. "Come with me."

WE picked our way over chunks of plaster and adobe out to what was left of the patio and the garden. José Manuel was there, sitting at Don Pedro's glass-topped table as though all was right with the world, shaven and shorn and his white Palm Beach without a spot on it. "Good morning," he said cheerfully, motioning to the place across the table. "Sleep well?" There was half a melon on my plate. There was a pot of coffee with a pot of hot milk beside it within reach. I filled my cup.

"Like a baby," I said.

"I'm sorry about last night."

"That's perfectly all right."

"I was upset," he explained. "There are times when one is unable to see things in perspective."

"Of course," I agreed. The melon was cold and sweet, and the coffee was better than average.

"I realize now that you couldn't help yourself."

"I realize that too," I said. "Oh, I could have let him shoot me."

The table was set for four. I indicated the two empty chairs.

"Mr. McCardle and my cousin Juan," said José Manuel. "They arrived very late."

"I thought Juan was in jail."

"Temporarily." He dismissed Juan with a gesture of his cigarette. "You should have remained in Langton."

I thought that was pretty obvious, so I let the remark pass and devoted more attention to the melon.

"This"—he waved at the shattered hacienda—"was premature."

"Don't tell me you just came down here to get me back," I said.

"Not at all."

"Or do I go back?"

"Naturally. . . . The coffee is better if you use more hot milk."

I used more hot milk and finished the melon. The rind was whisked away, and a dish of eggs *bénédict* was deposited in front of me by a genial Mexican soldier with a handlebar mustache. Things were looking up. "So I messed things up," I said.

"It couldn't be helped. I should have taken you into my confidence."

"And I should have taken you into mine," I said. "I was going to. I tried to after I walked in on Mr. Fenchester's remains, but you were out."

"I know."

"Murder always unnerves me," I said.

"Do you realize what you blundered into?"

"Vaguely."

"We were waiting," explained José Manuel. "The time, you see, was not yet. There were to have been outbreaks like this one all over Mexico. In Monterrey, in Pueblo, in Guadalajara and Tampico and Mexico City and Vera Cruz. Next Monday was the day, I think. Don Pedro still denies it. Later he will talk."

"He thought I was a cop," I said.

"I know. That's why this happened. You frightened him. So we had to move before we were ready."

"And some of the boys got away?"

"Not his boys," said José Manuel. "We weren't worried about Don Pedro. He's a fool, a blind fool. He let himself be used."

I dug deeper into the eggs.

"By Tony Braymer," José Manuel said. "She was back of it all."

I was afraid of that. I had gone to bed hoping I was wrong. I hadn't slept for a long time, thinking about Tony and what they would do to her. You don't like it when women get in jams, even very homely women.

"For ten years, she has worked for them." His tone was casual, almost disinterested. "She had charge of all work in Mexico."

"Will she die?"

Momentarily, his eyes had tenderness in them. "Does it matter?"

I shrugged. I said: "Then Popol and Larch and her brother took orders from her?"

"Her brother?"

"Fenchester."

"Nonsense," said Madero. "He wasn't her brother."

"That's what she said."

"She says many things. Don't you know that?"

I knew it, but I didn't like knowing it.

He smiled. "You mustn't feel too badly. It is so easy to be mistaken. So easy to blunder. I do foolish things at times. At the airport, I was foolish. I should not have been there."

I finished my eggs and emptied my cup. I picked up a cigarette, and he held a match for me.

"No," he went on. "That was a bad move. The man—Parks—I should have known he would be warned to watch for me. You see, we weren't quite sure then who was directing operations. We hoped Parks would lead us to the one. But he saw me, and died."

"I saw Popol at the airport. Was he waiting for Parks?"

"Yes."

"And who was Parks?"

"One of them. . . . Do you know where Barra Soto La Marina is?"

"No."

"Here in Mexico," said José Manuel. "On the east coast above Tampico. A lonely stretch of beach—very lonely. Next Monday night, when all over Mexico there was revolution, submarines would have surfaced close to the shore, and men would have landed. Perhaps fifty. Perhaps a hundred. Some of Don Pedro's followers would have been waiting to meet them. They would have scattered all over Mexico. They would have moved north to the United States. At least, that was the plan. Parks brought word that all was ready. But you see, we knew. So we would have been waiting at Barra Soto La Marina too. But—" He spread out his hands.

"I had to barge in."

He shrugged philosophically. "You blundered; I blundered. But you did one thing. We are sure now about Mrs. Braymer. And at least we got one submarine. This morning our planes found it lying offshore and sank it. And there will be no more bloodshed."

THAT was something. Don Pedro was locked up, and Tony Braymer was locked up, and in every big Mexican city the jails were probably bulging with White Vultures. But I didn't feel noble any more. He must have sensed my thoughts, for he reached across the table and squeezed my arm.

"How could you know?" he said softly.

Before I could burst into tears, McCardle and Aruba joined us. We shook hands. We said how glad we were

to see each other. Never in my life had I been so chummy with the law. I looked at Aruba and then I looked at Madero, and my eyes asked a question.

Madero smiled. "Juan has been working with us."

"Damn it, José," growled McCardle, through a hunk of melon. "You shouldn't have held out on me."

"He held out on my wife," said Aruba. "That was almost fatal."

José Manuel was brooding over a fresh cigarette, and I knew he was about ready to do some more explaining. This time about a subject we hadn't touched on so far.

"All right, José," McCardle's voice was gruff. "Go on, tell us. I'm down here to solve some murders. I'm supposed to take a murderer back with me. What did he kill his pals for?"

"Don Pedro? He didn't kill them," said José Manuel.

"The hell he didn't!"

"Of course not. Mrs. Braymer killed them."

I choked on a lungful of smoke. McCardle's fork stopped at the halfway mark on its journey mouthward.

"Mrs. Braymer?" McCardle barked.

"Yes."

"But—but—"

"Tell them, Juan," said José Manuel.

Aruba smiled. "It's like this: About a year ago I was walking by the Empire Theater. It was open then, and a man was sweeping the lobby. I knew him at once. I had just returned from visiting José in Mexico City, and José had his picture. José had told me how Don Pedro had been in Spain and Germany, and that he had left Germany and had come back. José was trying to find him. And there he was with a broom in the Empire lobby. Immediately, I called José."

"Fantastic, wasn't it?" said José.

NOTHING was fantastic to me any more.

"But amusing," said Aruba. "Imagine Don Pedro cleaning restrooms!" He chuckled, and José Manuel chuckled. McCardle didn't seem to find it amusing. He was scowling at his plate.

"Forgive me," said Aruba. "Of course you want the story. Well, as I said, I called José. We planned a campaign, then. Don Pedro knew nothing about me, so it was quite simple. I became friendly with Popol, let him have pictures that were contracted to me. He introduced me to Larch. Then my wife's sister became interested in Larch, and I gave the romance my blessing. Presently, Fenchester appeared, and I was introduced as one he could trust. You see, I have a theater in Guaymas. They wanted to use the theater."

"We thought Fenchester was the man we wanted then," put in Madero.

"My fault," insisted Aruba. He saw McCardle scowling again, so he went back to his story. "Fenchester finally approached me with a deal. He had some short subjects he wanted very much to release in Mexico. I didn't ask why. I asked how much there was in it, and he said there was plenty in it. Again I called José, and he said to show the pictures. I did." Another pause.

"What have pictures got to do with this?" grumbled McCardle.

"Each film had a code message in it somewhere," Aruba explained. "Fenchester fixed them up in Salt Lake. Bought up shorts no one wanted, and doctored them, then shipped them to me, and I ran them in Guaymas, and a couple of German agents saw them and got busy with a short-wave set and passed the word to submarines offshore. The pictures gave information on troop movements and ship movements. Wasn't that it, José?"

José nodded. "Of course, we saw each film first and made changes."

There was a brief pause for station identification, so I brought up something that was bothering me. "Fenchester

had a plane. He was flying it back and forth across the border. Why all this hugger-mugger with films?"

"Mrs. Braymer?" asked José.

I nodded.

"She lied to you," he said gently. "That plane never crossed the border. It was purchased for the reason it was used—to get Don Pedro out of the country when everything was ready. We have a very adequate border patrol, Mr. Logan. A strange plane could cross once but not again."

Aruba decided to carry the ball again. "We let things go along. I became more and more friendly with them, and then I knew Tony Braymer was in it too. That, I hadn't suspected. She was very clever."

"Brilliant," said José, sending a glance my way. Maybe he thought that would help.

"She didn't like my being in it," said Aruba. "She found out José was a relative of mine, and thought Popol and Larch and Fenchester were selling her out. Last Monday night she called for a showdown. That was because Park died at the airport. Popol and Larch met her at the Empire. They became frightened and wanted to run out on her."

José made an elaborate gesture. "So she shot them."

McCardle looked up from his eggs, and the glance he sent around the table was suspicious.

Aruba held up his hand. "Be patient, Mac. I'm coming to that. I learned of the meeting and trailed them to the theater. I slipped in. Everything would have been fine if my wife wasn't a suspicious, jealous woman. She thought I was meeting another woman. I followed them. She followed me. She was just inside the door—the side door—when the shots were fired. She couldn't see anything. I was hiding down there by the stairs, and I saw it happen. Lights were on, on the stairs, but not in the theater. I didn't want to be found there, so I ran. I went down the aisle and out the side door and over to the De Lanza, where José was waiting. How was I to know that Stell was in the theater, that she heard the shots and saw me leave? How was I to know she would think I killed them?" His voice grew soft, and he spent a couple of minutes thinking nice things about Stell. Such a good, loyal woman.

"She went up the aisle, and Tony must have heard her, because Tony wasn't there. The two bodies were lying at the foot of the stairs. Poor child—so frightened, but brave. Oh, so brave! She must save me. She called Eric and told him what had happened—or rather what she thought had happened. Eric's a child, and you know how children are. Especially children who work for newspapers. Full of schemes. He made plans. A fine scheme to protect me. Hide Larch's body, and let the police think he killed Popol. Only, he didn't have time enough to get the body out that night. Fenchester appeared suddenly at the side door, so Eric put Larch in the coffin and went away. Next night he came back and got the body and took it up in the hills."

"What did you have to confess for?" McCardle growled.

"That was my suggestion," said José gently. "Wrong, of course. But there was so much at stake, and we couldn't take chances." He saw McCardle's angry glance and added hastily: "Oh, we weren't afraid of you or your office. It was Eric. So young and hot-headed. And so many others in it too, Mr. McCardle."

"Me, for instance," I said.

"Yes, you." José Manuel kept his lids down, and not a shadow of expression crossed his face. "We were very dubious about you."

"Okay," McCardle said. "It doesn't matter now why you did it. Next time maybe you'll trust the police."

"Please, Mac," Aruba placated. "It was the best way, believe me. It worked. Tony Braymer went to pieces. Got in a row with Fenchester and shot him, and tried to make you believe Mr. Logan did it. You know the rest."

Oh, sure, we knew the rest. But who whacked me and stole Reel One of our picture?

"Fenchester hit you," said Aruba. "He was in the projection-room. There was a new film for Guaymas in the room, and he didn't want it to be found. He saw you there and slugged you and got the film. He took the first reel of your picture to confuse us."

I must have looked dubious. José said hastily: "I saw it happen. You see, I knew the body was in the coffin, and I was waiting to see who put it there. When you appeared, I thought—forgive me—that you had done it."

He might at least have asked Fenchester to desist when he saw the man crowning me with a chunk of iron. José Manuel read my mind. "We were waiting," he said. "We couldn't move then. There was so much—"

"There you are," said Aruba.

"Do I get Mrs. Braymer?" McCardle asked.

José Manuel shook his head. "I'm sorry."

"Look here," said McCardle. "She killed three men. I want her."

"Perhaps later," replied José Manuel.

McCardle had to be satisfied. . . . Well, his crimes were solved, and he should be happy. Nothing to puzzle over, nothing to worry about; everything neat and tidy. And if he was satisfied, who was I to question the explanation of Mexico's best detective?

José Manuel rose. "I'm going for a walk. Would you gentlemen like to accompany me?"

Not McCardle, not Aruba. But I would. We went through the dismal garden and across the pitted courtyard and through the shattered gate. In front of us the hill rose, on its crest the frightened-looking stone figure; near the stone some soldiers leaned on their guns. In front of them some of Don Pedro's boys worked leisurely with picks and shovels, and what they were digging was graves.

Madero indicated the stone. "The terrified monk," he said.

"I know. Don Pedro told me."

"The legend?"

"Part of it."

"Some day when I have time—" he said.

"You might tell me what scared him?"

"The peons say God frightened him. Because he sinned. He came here to hide, and built the house and the wall. But there was no escape. Some day I will tell you the rest."

"And some day perhaps you'll tell me the truth," I said. He gave me a quizzical smile. "The truth, Mr. Logan? About what?"

"Murder," I said.

"Oh, that," said José Manuel.

WE reached the rock. One of the grave-diggers climbed out and sat on the edge of his pit and lit a cigarette. It was Pepito. He saw me and waved pleasantly. I waved back.

"Almost deep enough, my friend," said Pepito. "See?" He jumped back in, and the top of his head just showed above the earth.

"A fatalist," I said.

"A Mexican," said José Manuel. The guy in a captain's uniform gave forth with a whole lot of Spanish, gesturing at the graves and at the men digging them.

"No," said José Manuel.

The captain insisted. I couldn't understand him, but I knew he was pleading, putting up an argument.

José Manuel was adamant. Whatever the captain wanted was impossible.

I said: "What gives?"

"Now the graves are finished, he wants to shoot them," said José Manuel. "He says that's what they always used to do."

José Manuel sighed. "It's difficult to explain to him that it cannot be. You see, he is an older man. He grew up in

the old Mexico, the Mexico of revolution and sudden death."

"What did you tell him?"

"That these graves are for the dead," José Manuel said. "That this is a democracy. That these men are Mexicans, even though they may not agree with us. That they have the right to speak and to protest. And the right to be tried by a jury of their peers. Not by a captain, not by me."

A civilized man, José Manuel Madero. A kind, just man. "Besides," he added, "our men are tired. And if we shoot them now, who will fill the graves?"

THERE was a wire waiting for me on Sophie Arbuckle's desk in the dreary outer office of Popol Enterprises. I read it standing at the window, through which I could see the big banner that was stretched across Broadway announcing the western première of that thrilling, soul-stirring epic of the unburied dead, "The Invisible Zombie." Tonight, eight o'clock at the Empire, a bedroom suite absolutely free, and Langton's biggest family making a personal appearance on the stage. The telegram was from E. Preston Zellner, acting president of Far Western Theaters, and it was a heart-warming piece of literature:

CONGRATULATIONS ON GOOD JOB, AND MAY EMPIRE OPENING EXCEED EXPECTATIONS. REGRET REORGANIZATION PLANS MAKE RETRENCHMENT NECESSARY. DO, YOU WISH FINAL CHECK SENT LANGTON OR WILL YOU RETURN SALT LAKE? PLEASE AUTHORIZE SECRETARY TURN OVER YOUR FILES TO JUNIOR, WHO IN ADDITION TO OTHER DUTIES WILL CARRY ON YOUR GREAT WORK.

"Good news?" Miss Arbuckle fluttered.

"Wonderful," I said. "I'm fired."

"They can't do that," said Miss Arbuckle.

"Of course they can't," I said, and tossed her the wire. "Answer it. Tell him to send the check to the Santa Cruz." The inner office door was closed. I opened it, went in. Spyros was at his son's desk in the hot, dimly lighted room, not doing anything, just sitting there, old and frail and sad, with his wrinkled hands spread out on the dirty blotter. He acknowledged my entry with a curt nod.

"McCardle call you?" I asked.

Another nod.

"I'm sorry about everything," I said.

Very slowly he opened a drawer, took out a twisted cigar, bit off the end and lit it. He spoke, maybe to me, maybe to the wall. "I'm a Greek."

"Yes," I said.

"Many Greeks have died," he went on. "Many more will die. I grieve for them." Such an old, old man, such a very little man; but there was a fire burning in him, a fine, bright fire. "And for no one else," he added.

I lit a cigarette and waited, and the room got hotter, and way off in the hills the thunder was grumbling at the world. Then I knew he had said all there was to say, so I left him. Downstairs, Eric Prentiss was waiting for me. . . .

The dinner at the Prentiss home that Saturday night was not in my honor. Even if I had captured a notorious Axis spy single-handed, even if José Manuel Madero had allowed me to fly him and McCardle back to Langton in Sylvan Fenchester's plane, there was something more important. Eric had just received notice the Army had changed its mind. The Signal Corps wanted him.

I sat across the table from Sally, and she kept smiling at me. Maybe I should stay in Langton. I could. Not five minutes ago Juan Aruba had offered me a job as his assistant. Such beautiful eyes, such lovely full lips, and was Eric old enough to appreciate her? Besides, he was going away.

Hilary was at one end of the table, his kind face drawn and tired, his thin shoulders bent a little more than usual. Now and again he sent a warm look toward the other end where Kelly sat, as though trying to comfort her. Not the

vivid Kelly of the other night—but even if Godfrey had been a heel, maybe she was fond of him. Just the five of us. José Manuel was having dinner with his wife's cousin. McCardle was home, probably catching up on Dick Tracy. Tony Braymer should be asleep in her cell in the Mexico City jail, or maybe she was lying awake repenting her sins. "Did you see her again?" Sally asked.

"Just for a minute," I said. "Before the captain put her in the plane. She wasn't friendly."

"I can't believe it," Sally said. "I never liked her much but—I didn't think—I didn't know—"

Eric came to life in a hurry. "She'd do anything," he said. "Isn't that what you say, Hilary?"

Hilary cleared his throat, but he didn't speak. How could he? He was a minister, and ministers must be charitable. He attacked his meat with a good deal of vigor.

"She was so very pretty," Sally said. "Don't you think so, Ben?"

"I suppose she was," I said casually. Then I realized we were using the past tense, and I fell silent.

Kelly came to my rescue. Her tone was strained, unnatural. "Let's talk about something else." I kept looking across at Sally, and every time I got a nice smile.

"What are you going to do?" I asked her after a while.

"I haven't made up my mind," said Sally.

"Will you stay here?"

She looked at Eric, and then she looked at me, and then she devoted her attention to her broiled quail. I stopped asking questions.

KELLY didn't attend the première. Hilary suggested staying with her, but she refused. He sat with me in the rear of the station-wagon, and Eric and Sally sat in front, and all the way downtown Eric was wondering what the Signal Corps would do with him.

The theater was jammed, and why not? Hadn't Juan Aruba closed his house at six o'clock so the only picture in town was "The Invisible Zombie," which was better than no picture at all? In my honor, Aruba said. So Far Western would realize what a mistake had been made. I knew differently. He did it because he was sorry for Spyros Popol, and wanted to see him keep his job.

McCardle was there with his wife and kids. The desk sergeant was there with his wife and mother. The mayor was there with a beautiful wench who turned out to be his daughter. And outside the theater was Señor Gutierrez, and behind him was his family giving me reproving glances.

I sat on one side of Sally and Eric sat on the other, and Hilary sat on the aisle. Right behind me was José Manuel Madero, and his wife's cousin and his wife's cousin's wife.

The curtain went up at eight sharp. The picture was mercifully over at nine-thirty. Langton's biggest family made its appearance, and almost everyone cheered. Up in the balcony somebody hissed a few times but not enough to matter. The cashier's brother won the bedroom suite, and that was that. But I didn't realize that Sally and Eric had been holding hands through the whole business until the lights went up, so I said good-night in the foyer.

"I'm tired," I said.

"We'll see you tomorrow?" Eric asked. "How about a swim?"

"I'll let you know," I said. A hand touched my shoulder. I turned and found José Manuel Madero smiling at me.

"Juan tells me you refused his offer," José Manuel said.

I nodded. Eric was at the door leading out into the jungle waiting for Sally to come back from the powder-room, the lucky guy. Hilary and Aruba and Mrs. Aruba were with him.

"He's a fine man," said José Manuel. "He would treat you well."

Spyros Popol came down the stairs, hesitated for a moment at the foot, then moved slowly into the lobby.

"I'm tired of pictures," I said. "They're for children."

"If you won't work for him, will you work for me?" Madero opened his cigarette-case, flipped a cigarette at his mouth, caught it and grinned. The coat of his powder blue gabardine suit was open, and I saw that something new had been added. He had on a gun-belt, and there was a frontier model six-shooter with a pearl handle in the holster. He noted my glance, patted the gun. "Mr. McCordle gave it to me. I need a pilot. I can promise you the work will not be dull."

Sally threw me a smile as she went by. She took Eric's arm, and off they went, with Hilary trailing behind. Juan Aruba and his wife looked our way, saw we were busy and waved good-by. Old Popol flipped his cigarette at the curb, came back in and went upstairs, his white head high.

"I'll take the job," I said.

"Fine."

"We have time now," I said. "So you can tell me."

"The legend?"

"No. The truth. Why did you lie to McCordle?"

"Lie?"

"Tony Braymer didn't kill them," I said.

He asked softly: "How did you know I lied?"

"The gun, for one thing," I said. "It wasn't in the desk upstairs, as Aruba said. It was in George Popol's office."

"Perhaps Popol brought it here with him."

"Perhaps."

"What else?"

"I talked to the old man," I said. "About Greece and about the people of Greece, and about those who have died, and about those one should grieve for."

"Such an old man," José Manuel said, and now there was no veil in front of his eyes. "Such a brave old man. His boy was a traitor. Larch was a traitor. Fenchester was a traitor. They had to die."

"Aruba knows?"

"Of course. He saw it happen. He was hiding over there when the two men came down the stairs. Mr. Popol was waiting for his son. He killed them both."

"And Mrs. Aruba was waiting too?"

"Oh, yes. That part was true. She thought Juan did it. So did the tall one—Prentiss. And the priest. Only you don't call him a priest, do you?"

"No," I said. "We call him a parson."

"Juan didn't lie very much," said José Manuel. "Only about who killed them. They should have been killed. So why punish the old gentleman?"

"Will you shoot her?"

"Not for murder, Mr. Logan. For treason—" He shrugged. "Who knows what will happen? She is very beautiful. In Mexico too, men bow to beauty."

"All right," I said. "Come on. I need a drink."

TOWARD Nogales the thunder was faint. The moon was right above the street, and the stars were thick.

A fine night for flying. A fine night for sitting on a hill in the pale dark. I hoped Sally and Eric would be happy. I hoped Eric would come back safely. I hoped Kelly would realize how swell Hilary was. I hoped the gentlemen of Mexico would appreciate beauty enough. I hoped they wouldn't be too tough on Don Pedro. The least they could do was bury him with his forefathers, and maybe stretch a point and rescue his brother from that common bandit grave.

I sighed. A voice spoke softly, and it wasn't Madero's voice. Señor Gutierrez was standing in front of us, and behind him was his family.

"They cheated you," Señor Gutierrez said. "They were not honest with you, those Lopez. Now me—I have proof." He waved at his gang. "These are my children, all of them."

"You should be very proud," said José Manuel Madero.

THE END



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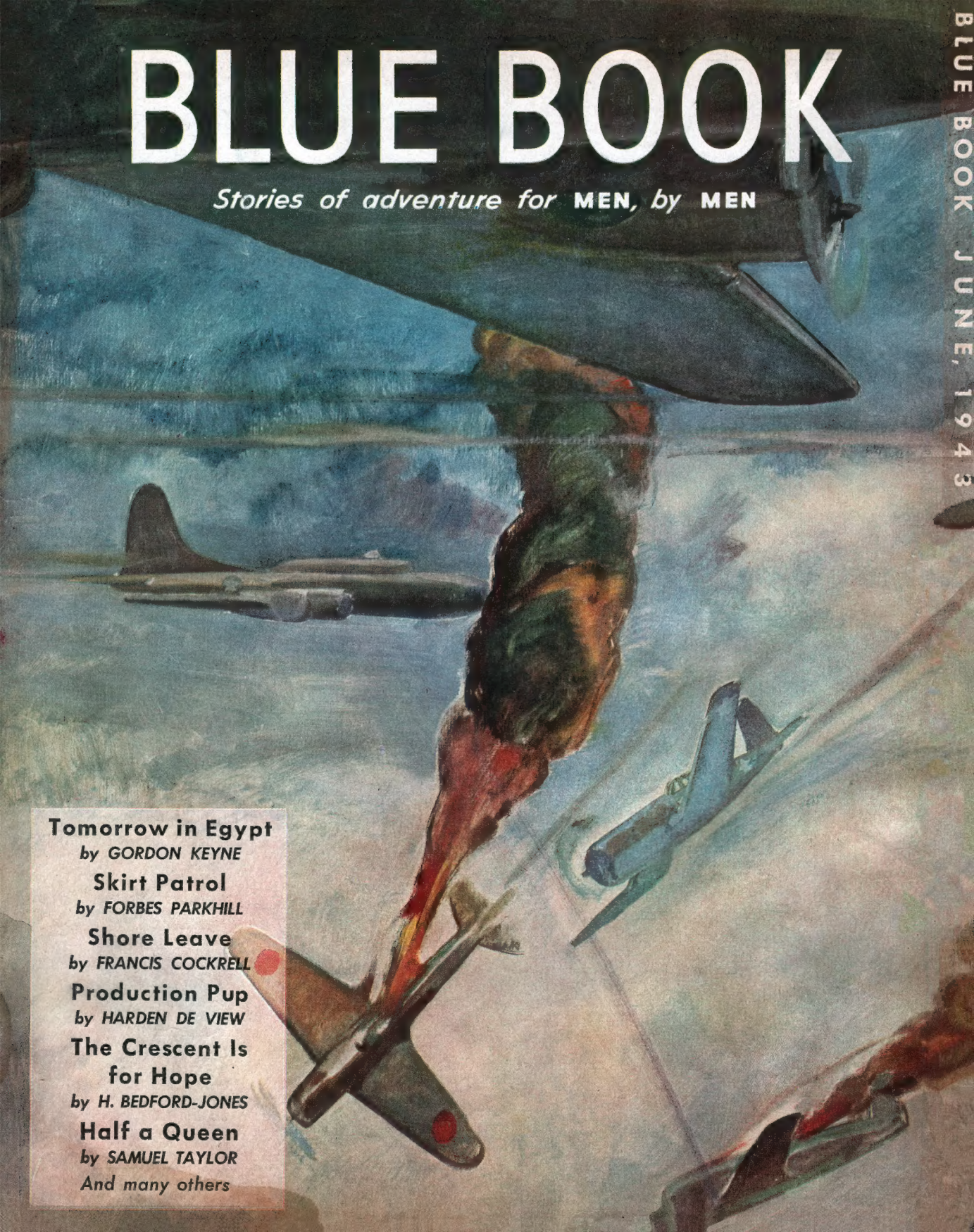
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